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Lost God Found

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by NORVAL F. PEASE

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Eighty-five years ago Joseph Parker, pastor of the City Temple in London, described the religious apostasy of his day as follows:

"We have lost everything—prophecy, . . . miracles, heroisms—we have lost them all! It is just like us—fools, we ought never to have been trusted with anything! What have we left now? Nothing. Miracles gone, prophecy gone, the devil gone, God—going."—*The People's Bible*, N.Y., 1881, Vol. 18, p. 36. Quoted in Brenner, *The Way of Worship*, pages 133, 134. If Parker were to return and look at the religious scene today, he could almost say, "God—gone."

Mankind has been likened to a kindergarten, trying to spell the word "God" with the wrong blocks. In their lack of understanding, some spell "tyrant," while others spell "indulgent grandfather." Others spell "myth," "father image," and "ultimate reality." And then there are others who, with greater maturity and insight, find the right blocks. They see God the

Creator, the Eternal Father, the Great Companion.

Much might be said about the greatness and sovereignty of God. As man's knowledge of the universe increases, his sense of awe should also increase. But too often man ascribes greatness to himself, the learner, rather than to God, the Source of all that is learned.

At the funeral of Louis XIV (Louis the Great) of France, the court preacher, Massillon, rebuked the pomp and pride that surrounded him by beginning his funeral oration with the words, "God only is great." This is a truth we all might well remember. The missionary, Hudson Taylor, was once told, "You must have a very great faith." He replied, "On the contrary, my faith has often been weak. However, I do know that I have a great God." John the revelator heard the combined choirs of the universe singing, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

When I was a college student taking a major in history, my professor had the following quotation framed on the wall of his classroom:

"In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the Word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will."—White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 499, 500.

But it is another aspect of God that I wish to stress. His power and sovereignty we may grant and yet feel very remote from Him. I believe the blocks can be so arranged that they will spell "Companion," and I believe that this familiar word fittingly describes our God.

Recently I visited the last home of John Wesley in London. His biographers have pictured the scene of his death. The old man with his long white hair lay in his bed, surrounded by a few of his friends. Shortly before his passing he raised his head and uttered his final words, "The best of all is, God is with us." Surely this old veteran of the pulpit must have been echoing the words of Isaiah: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." Isaiah 43:2, 3. There may also have been in the back of the old preacher's mind the words of the apostle Paul on Mars' Hill, "Though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being." Acts 17:27, 28.

**LOST
GOD
FOUND**

If You Have Lost Him, Find Him Here. Not an Impersonal Force—a "Ground of Being"—but a Close Personal Companion.

God is so far beyond the limits of human understanding that the Bible writers use figures of speech to describe Him. Each of these images adds some dimension to our grasp of the nature of God. For example, the psalmist says, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Here in graphic words is a picture of companionship and closeness. "He leadeth me." "Thou art with me." "Thou preparest a table before me." "Thou anointest my head with oil." "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." How could language span the gap between God and man more effectively? How could companionship be stressed more strongly? The psalmist's words leave no room for a God who is a philosophical abstraction or an absentee landlord.

Then there is the New Testament image of the Father. This image is used many times—seventeen references in the Sermon on the Mount and twenty-three in John 14. It seems that one of the major concerns of our Lord was to teach men to think of God as Father. Again we see the picture of companionship, of closeness. God was not an impersonal force, a first cause, a "ground of being," but a Father.

Contemporary theology is, unfortunately, erasing this beautiful relationship by depersonalizing and demythologizing God. Leonard Griffith, the present pastor of the City Temple in London, has published a sermon entitled "Where Do We Find God?" (*God's Time and Ours*, Abingdon, 1964). In this sermon he tells the familiar story of Tad Lincoln's coming to Secretary Chase one day and saying, "I want my father." Tad had been fighting and had come off second best. The storyteller suggests that Secretary Chase *might* have told Tad, "I will tell the Chief Executive of the nation that you would like to see him." Or Secretary Seward *might* have told Tad, "I will tell a remarkable diplomat that you would like to see him." Or Secretary Stanton *might* have said to Tad, "I will get for you the commander in chief of the Armies of the United States." The point of the story is that Tad was not interested in chief executives, diplomats, or commanders in chief. He wanted his father. Griffith then applies the story.

"So the *avant-garde* theologians who attempt to help us by defining God in philosophical language as 'Ultimate Reality' or as 'the infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being' are really not helping us at all. Such scholarly and impressive definitions may express the truth about God, but the human heart recoils from them because they do not describe *our* God. When all the scholars have had their say, we still want God as we, His children, know Him and as we have experienced Him—a Father above and beyond us, who created and cares for us, who guides and governs us, a God who listens to our prayers. . . . 'Very interesting indeed,' I thought after reading the book, *Honest to God*, but wiping away the blood and dirt from my soul, I cried, 'I still want my Father.'"

Another example of the companionship of God is found in the story of the Exodus. A motly group of slaves were organized by a great leader, Moses. This mob was led out of their bondage into an inhospitable wilderness where they spent forty years wandering, complaining, rebelling. During every day of these forty difficult years there was a pillar of fire. Under all sorts of stresses, conflicts, apostasies, and disappointments, He was there. During these weary years, God proved Himself a God who was interested in

people, immature people, repulsive people, helpless people,—people who didn't appreciate Him. He provided for these people, supplying their necessities and protecting them from their enemies. He had a plan for these people, far beyond their ability to understand.

As we witness God's concern for these people, and His companionship with them in work and in worship, we are led to be ashamed of our fears. The final issues of the history of this world are in the hands of Him who parted the Red Sea and the Jordan, who brought water from the rock and manna from the desert, who made His will known from a mountaintop, and whose protecting hand was constantly over His defenseless people.

The companionship of God is most vividly taught in Jesus Christ. Of Him it was said, "And they shall call His name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, *God with us.*" Matthew 1:23. Jesus Himself said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." John 14:9. In the incarnation, God became a companion of man in the fullest extent. In the words of the Bible translator, J. B. Phillips, men are able to see in Christ "God Himself coping with life on the very terms that He has imposed upon His creatures. . . . God not seated high on a throne, but down in the battlefield of life."—J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small*, pages 78, 79.

In Christ, God was with the fishermen in their boats, the beggars by the roadside, the guests at a wedding. In Christ He associated with publicans at their feasts, with mourners at a funeral, with children at their play. He was a companion of worshipers in the synagogue and in the temple and of carpenters in Nazareth. God's unfathomable grace not only caused Him to pay a great price for man's redemption; it also caused Him to identify Himself with man as a companion and a friend. In Jesus, God was focused on this earth and made real to man.

And the closeness of the new relationship between God and man was not to be limited to Christ's brief visit to the earth. Before He left, Jesus said, "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever." John 14:16. The companionship of God in the person of the Holy Spirit was to continue uninterrupted, that the warmth of divine love and security of divine guidance might ever be known to man.

What does all of this mean to ordinary men and women like ourselves living in the twentieth century? We live in an age of secularism, which one theologian has defined as "the organization of life as if there were no God." (Georgia Harkness, quoted in Abbey, *Preaching to the Contemporary Mind*, page 85.)

Another theologian has explained secularism as follows: "By secularization I mean the absence of the religious, transcendent, or ultimate dimension or reference in all the facets of life, and the consequent derivation of all standards and goals solely from the natural and social environments in which men live. It is as if for our age the receiving set for religion had been tuned way down, or in some cases turned quite off. For multitudes of us (and they seem to be most characteristic of our time) no experience of God is either expected or felt, no word from God listened for or heard, and no command of God received or obeyed. To many the question of the existence or experience of these things is not even intelligible or meaningful. Most of us go about

our lives quite as if there were no God at all, and until tragedy or something equally forceful strikes us, we do not notice this lack."—Gilkey, *How the Church Can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself*, pages 20, 21.

These quotations describe the spirit of our age. All about us people are unconcerned about God. Even among many church people there is no great sense of awe, no deep sense of responsibility to God, no rich tradition of God, or no future expectation in which God is involved. Men have lost God, and they scarcely miss Him. Some disbelieve God; others merely find nothing for Him to do.

Some years ago a book was written entitled *If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach*. In this book prominent clergymen published the sermons they considered most important. Among them was a sermon by the late Dr. William Stidger, a professor at Harvard Divinity School, entitled "Aware of the Eternal." He referred to an interesting but little-known fact regarding Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. According to Dr. Stidger, all of the available drafts of the speech prepared before delivery omit the words "under God" in the line "This nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom"; but all of the reporters' copies include these words. Dr. Stidger explains the variation as follows: "But, under the stress of that great occasion, as Lincoln stood on his feet in that battlefield, this great man suddenly felt the presence of the Eternal, the consciousness of his oneness with God, and he extemporized that phrase which is now an immortal part of his address: "That this nation, *under God*, shall have a new birth of freedom.'"

Life, if it is to be rich and meaningful, must be lived "under God." This is the opposite of our empty, hollow, disappointing secularism. "Under God" means not only a theoretical belief in God but a companionship with God. It is time that we include the words "under God" in the script of our lives.

Contemporary men, even many who consider themselves Christians, are like the Russian cosmonaut, Gherman Titov, who reported that he saw no sign of God in outer space. What kind of "sign" he was looking for, he does not reveal. How different was his attitude from that of Gordon Cooper, who recorded the (Continued on page 31)

TEST YOUR "WORD" POWER

by
Richard
H.
Utt



CAMERA CLIX

The language of the Bible, especially in the King James Version, permeates our present-day speech and writing. So great is the impact of the Bible that almost every English-speaking person quotes the Bible daily whether he ever reads it or not. Below are some of the Bible expressions and allusions commonly used in speaking and writing. See if you can identify their source, choosing your answers from the list at the bottom of the page. (One answer may be used for more than one question.)

1. *When people have tried repeatedly to solve a problem and failed, we say they are "at their wit's end."* _____
2. *Meting out punishment corresponding to the crime committed is often described as "eye for eye, tooth for tooth."* _____
3. *A much-loved person, perhaps a favorite child, is still spoken of as "the apple of one's eye."* _____
4. *A weak thing, or person, which one cannot safely lean on for support, is a "broken reed."* _____
5. *"Cast thy bread upon the waters" means to do good without hope of immediate reward.* _____
6. *Advocating turning from war to peace, many modern speakers have used the Biblical metaphor, "Beat their swords into plowshares."* _____
7. *The stigma of murder is still referred to as the "brand" or "mark of Cain."* _____
8. *"A fly in the ointment" alludes to the Bible verse that says, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor."* _____
9. *When someone says, "I wash my hands of the affair," he alludes to a well-known Bible incident.* _____
10. *"Tell it not in Gath," means to keep news of one's own misfortunes from the enemy.* _____

Genesis, Exodus, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Isaiah, Matthew, Ecclesiastes

(Answers on page 33)

Miracle in the Jungle

Caleb, a graduate of the Ayer Manis School, was hired by the government to teach at the then heathen village of Engkaruh. He taught the children in their school five days a week. On weekends he taught both the children and their parents about Jesus. Soon his Christian witness aroused the entire village.

The interest was so great that Caleb called for help from Principal Ortner and the students of the Ayer Manis School. They are used to such calls, for every weekend they scatter throughout the countryside to spread the gospel, traveling by riverboat, by bus, by jeep, by bicycle, and afoot. And though Engkaruh at that time was five hours walk through the steamy jungle, Ayer Manis responded.

Every other week for more than a year Ortner and his students tramped through the jungle and held meetings in this village.

Today there is a church in Engkaruh. The three long-houses are gradually being abandoned for cleaner and more healthful separate houses. Superstition, devil worship, and witchcraft have lost their power to charm the villagers. Nearly all of the four hundred villagers have become followers of Christ.

Principal Ortner asked the old chief, "How do you feel about your people becoming Christians, having their lives changed by the power of God?"

The chief answered: "Before we became Christians, when we went to make rice in the field, we had to make

sacrifices to appease the devils. Now we no longer have to worry about the devils' disturbing us everywhere we go. I am very glad I became a Christian. I am very glad my people have become Christians. Since we became Christians, all the people in the village are very happy, for we do not have to worry about the evil spirits; also there is much less sickness in the village, and the village is being improved."

I sat next to Cliff in the Engkaruh Church one Sabbath not many weeks ago. The people present had once chewed betel nut, had often fallen to the floor insensible as a result of drinking rice wine, had reveled in immorality, had worshiped the spirits of the human heads hanging in the center house. Now all is changed. These people have been completely transformed by the gospel. It's a miracle. A real miracle. [END]

Lost God Found

(Continued from page 23)

following prayer during his space flight: "I want to thank You for letting me fly this flight. Thank You for the privilege of being able to be in this position. To be in this wondrous place, seeing all these startling, wonderful things that You have created. Help, guide, and direct all of us that we may shape our lives to be much better Christians. So that we help one another and work with one another rather than fighting and bickering. Help us to complete this mission successfully. . . . Be with all our families. Give us guidance and encouragement, and let them know that everything will be OK. We ask in Thy name. Amen."

Thank God for men like Gordon Cooper who aren't ashamed to admit their sense of the companionship of God. This is especially praiseworthy for a young man who might easily be influenced by sophisticated secularism.

It matters not whether we are astronauts or laborers, whether we are hurtling through space or crawling on the earth's surface, "the best of all is, God is with us." Philosophers and theologians may exhaust their vocabularies in describing His attributes and explaining His nature. For most of us it is quite sufficient to know that He is the great Companion who has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Hebrews 13:5. This means that he has resources adequate for every one of our needs. The psalmist exclaimed, "O, God, thou art *my* God." Psalm 63:1. He is also *our* God. In His new covenant He promises to be *to us* a God. Hebrews 8:10. Why should we allow ourselves to be deprived of His companionship by unbelief? The great reality of the companionship of God is staggering; it is overwhelming. We can understand the feeling of Faber when he wrote:

"That Thou should'st think so much of me,
And be the God Thou art,
Is darkness to my intellect
But sunshine to my heart."

—Quoted in Weatherhead, *The Significance of Silence*, page 100. [END]

The Wheel of Life

by M. M. Duncan

*Shaped by the potter's wheel of life,
Our lives take form:
Warped and corroded by the stress
Of strife and storm.*

*Misshapen is the clay if hate
Is all we know,
And dull and drab the finished glaze
Our lives will show.*

*But if God's hand is on the wheel,
The clay takes form
In the beauteous symmetry and hues
All bright and warm.*

*The shattered fragments of our lives
He can remold.
I pray the pattern of my soul
His touch may hold.*