

The Way God Has Been Portrayed to Us, Part Two

Behind so much that is said about church and church matters, behind so many of our groundless fears, behind our haunting sense of unworthiness, down beneath the knot in our gut, is this notion of an angry vengeful God, given to fierce rage, and despising us in our sinfulness and stupidity. Paul, however, in 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2 is saying that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting people's sins against them. God did not erect the barriers between him and us. We have, and they're largely in our minds. We've made them up.

Paul states this even more clearly in Colossians 1:21: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior." But the alienation, the "disconnect", was all "in your mind." You act like a spiritual jerk, in ways you hate yourself for, in ways you know are wrong, in ways you know are irresponsible, and you imagine God must hate you, and now, feeling completely disconnected from God, you keep acting like a spiritual jerk. Until you've lost all power to do otherwise.

So now you and I must be reconciled to God, reconnected to God, in communion with God, in a state of grace and trust with God. We must see God as God is, loving, reconciling, merciful, sacrificial to the core, paying the last full measure, laying down his life for us. And we must do whatever it takes to be reconciled to God. If it means starting over and being born again, we do it. Sooner or later everyone has to do this. If it means changing the way we picture God, we do it. If it means changing the way we understand certain texts, we do it. If it means changing the way we understand certain doctrines, we do it. If it means changing the way we picture life after death, the ways we picture Heaven and Hell, we do it. If it means after long years of plodding along on our own power we will finally let go and trust God, we will do it. We will be reconciled to him. And this God we seek to encounter. There is nothing I want more than to live in conscious, mindful awareness of God because now I "get" God. I see God as God is: irrepressible love, a loving, creative, connecting Spirit, more personal than I ever before imagined, calling us into connection, into loving connection with one another, the source of loving kindness everywhere.

It does, however, come down to how we see God. Whether or not we will ever seek to encounter God's presence comes down to how we see God. The old way of seeing God was wrong. Tragically wrong. This notion that God is so outraged and angry at us that he could only be satisfied by the death of his son has left a dreadful psychological scar on the soul of Western society, a deep existential uncertainty, a primal anxiety about where we stand with God, an abiding, unending distrust. Sometimes this spiritual crisis is relieved only by the denial that such a God exists. One way or another, it leads to Edvard Munch's "Scream." For, in truth, how can I really trust that any true father would be "satisfied" by the execution of his beloved son, especially when preachers keep telling me that I personally brought about his death? How can anyone?¹ It doesn't make sense.

But if we go back to Scripture, to a close reading of Scripture, if we stop and look and see, we will see that we bring to the world a whole new vision of God, a whole new picture of God. We

reveal God to people in ways that many have never imagined him, yes, as El Shaddai, the Mighty One of Israel, the center and soul of the universe, a God of dynamic love who does not endure for long what is unloving. But he is also a shepherd who goes out into the wilderness looking for us when we are lost! He is also a father who runs to us when we are still a long ways off. He is a God who became one of us and died for us, who bleeds for us, who was in Christ, suffering the scourging and the stripping, feeling the nails driven in, enduring the thirst, the taunts, the excruciating pain in wrists and feet, gasping for breath. And this God we seek to encounter. When we see this, we hunger to live mindfully, consciously in the presence of God, to experience God in the food we eat, the people we meet, the work we do, the fun we have, and the struggles we face. 24/7. For short moments of time we have this euphoric sense that God is as close as the air that we breathe.

To this God we are called. To this God we come and drink. In this God we believe. This God we trust. And now streams of living water flow from within us. We feel reborn. We are free, free at last. God's love pours into us, and joy and vitality pour out of us. We feel one with God. Our whole being floods with ecstasy. Time becomes eternity. We feel filled with previously unimaginable power. We are released from the bondage of self and are now at peace with the universe. And we can do what we never could before. Before we were too thirsty, too weary, too troubled in heart. But now with this God in whom we live and move and have being, immersed in this loving, dynamic force field, filled by this connecting Spirit, so deeply personal, so deeply loving, we can do amazing things.

May streams of living water flow from within you. May you find your way from the tiresome preoccupations of the past to encountering the presence of this loving God. May you see that God is not well-hidden. May you see that God is everywhere.

– Dale Pauls

¹ Anthony Bartlett, *Cross Purposes: The Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement*, 86.