

What is Truth? Part 3

What is the most important Truth About God?

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By Rev. Timothy B. White

Once, while we were ministering in Maine, one man in our congregation asked me if I was mad at him. Apparently, my facial expression at the time did not accurately reflect my actual attitude. His question surprised me at first, and then it disturbed me to think that he would have such a false perception of my thoughts toward him. Had he not allowed me to clear up his misconception, my relationship as his pastor would have been seriously hindered.

What are the ramifications of a false perception of God? Is God mad at me too? For that matter, what does He really think of me? What does He expect from me? To what, in this life, can He be compared? Our perception of who God is will determine how or if we will seek to know Him.

Jesus told a story (called a parable) about a middle east father who had two sons (maybe you have heard this one?). The younger son demanded that his father give him his share of the inheritance now before his father died. In essence, saying, “I wish you were dead.” Surprisingly, the father complied and the son headed to a far-off distance country where he squandered all of his inheritance in pursuit of what he thought would bring him happiness. In the end, he was without money, shelter, friends, and any sense of dignity. Even the pigs he was hired to feed had better food than he. (See Luke 15:11-24)

In this story, we are the younger son, and God is the Father. The son’s actions illustrate what turning our back on God is like, and the loss the son incurred is symbolic of the consequences of a sinful, self-centered life. The father’s willingness to grant the son’s initial demand demonstrates that God will not force anyone to love and serve Him – love must be voluntary and from the heart.

Back to the story: One day, while slinging the slop for the pigs, he found himself longing to eat their food, and at that point, he had an awakening. He realized that he had made the most severe errors (sins) one could make in his day. He had dishonored his father, disparaged his only inheritance, and he, himself, had now become a disgrace. This “Prodigal Son” knew that the role of a son was lost to him, but he would be glad to live as one of his father’s servants (at least they had plenty to eat and a place to live) – if only his father would forgive him and give him a servant’s role.

The son’s awakening is a picture of what it means to “repent” of one’s sin. To repent means to “turn around” and “change your mind” – the son did both. The son’s willingness to risk returning to his father was based on what he knew about his father’s character and love. This knowledge gave him hope.

As the younger son got within sight of his home, we read that “the father saw his son in the distance,” – indicating that the father frequently searched the horizon, hoping for his son’s return. Immediately the father was “filled with compassion” for his son, runs to meet him, wraps his arms around him, and greets him with a father’s kiss. Then, without any hesitation, the son tells his father how he had “sinned against heaven (i.e., God) and you (father)” and was no longer worthy of being called his son.

However, that was as far as the son got because without missing a beat, his father called his servants to bring the best robe they could find, put a ring on his returned son’s finger (reinstating his “son-ship”), and sandals on his feet. Then, to top it off, the father instructed the servants to prepare the most fabulous family barbeque they had ever had in celebration of this son, who “was dead and is alive again – was lost and is found.”

The separation from his father, the loss of his inheritance, and subsequent trouble were due solely to the son’s self-centeredness and rejection of his father. However, the latter never stopped loving his son and remained ready to receive him back once he saw the error of his ways. So likewise, God the Father is watching and willing to receive anyone who would come to him in the same manner as this son returned to his father. Going further, we see that nothing was too evil or sinful for the Father to forgive.

Please take note that when Jesus’ disciples asked that He teach them to pray, he began by saying, “Pray, then in this way: Our Father...” (Matt. 6:9). Thus, Jesus instructed them to address God as “Father” over and above any number of other titles we could imagine. A good father will love his children regardless of their behavior and will gladly receive back those who have gone astray.

Do you feel separated from God the Father? Whatever is the source of that separation, God’s Father-heart of love for you extends far beyond your sinful ways. He is more than willing to receive you and completely forgive the worst of the worst. As a current worship song says, “He is for you, not against you.” So now, what are you waiting for?