

THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

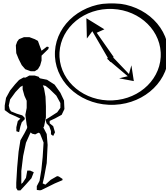
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Look, new times!

Time of Assembly



Every other Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.

OR

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

The Problem With a Comprehensible God

By Matthew W. Bassford

In my time as a preacher, I've had my share of conversations with people who thought they had a moral or philosophical justification for their agnosticism/atheism. They found something in the Bible they didn't like. Maybe it was God commanding the slaughter of the Canaanite children. Maybe it was God condemning the practice of homosexuality as sinful. Maybe it was God's foreknowledge of human activity. Regardless, there was something that displeased them, they couldn't see how it was consistent with their understanding of God, so they concluded that God didn't exist.

I believe there are answers to all of these objections (and the others like them), but there's an even more fundamental problem with that line of reasoning. All of these scenarios begin with the doubter constructing their version of God (possibly in good faith; possibly as a straw man), comparing their construct to the Biblical record, and concluding that the God of the Bible doesn't measure up. Their God wouldn't do that!

To which I say, "So what?" The God of the Bible doesn't make sense to them. Why should they have any expectation that a being of vastly greater understanding (which is how the Bible presents God) ought to make sense to them?

I am quite confident that five years ago, when I told my children that they couldn't eat Halloween candy for three meals a day, it didn't make sense to them either. "Candy tastes good, and it is there to be eaten. It tastes better than stuffed peppers, so we should have it for dinner instead of stuffed peppers. What am I missing?"

Children don't know what they don't know, and they don't understand what they don't understand. And yet, my

five-year-olds were much closer in intellect to me than I or any atheist doubter is to God. If the child is unable to understand the parent, how much more will the creation struggle to understand the Creator!

Consequently, we should expect there to be many times when God does or tells us to do things that don't make sense to us. A God who is omniscient ought to be incomprehensible to human beings who aren't. Just like the toddler isn't going to back Mom into a logical corner so that she offers up candy on demand, we aren't going to be able to use the times that God doesn't make sense to us to prove that He doesn't exist. The problem isn't Him. It's us.

Indeed, it is the comprehensible God who looks much more like a figment of the human imagination. The gods of the Greeks were comprehensible. They got in ridiculous fusses with each other as people do. They committed adultery as people do.

Despite their greater power, these gods fit into a human frame. They were idols, crafted to resemble people not only in outward features but in personality and scope. They made sense because they were human in origin.

The God of the Bible does not make sense like that because He did not come from us. He is not human or human-like. He doesn't even exist in the same state of reality. He is utterly alien to us, and it is a tribute to His skill in communication that we are able to understand Him even as well as we do.

The alien-ness and incomprehensibility of God, rather than being a sign of His non-existence, really is proof to the contrary. If we don't understand Him, that is as it should be. We can expect to have unanswered questions for as long as we live and may-be thereafter. Conversely, if we think we do understand Him, we're missing something.

Our job is not to make God make sense. It is to seek to please Him. As Moses wisely observed in [Deuteronomy 29:29](#), "*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may obey all the words of this law.*"

Listening to the Hard Sayings

By Matthew W. Bassford

The law of Christ is not as I would have written it. There are actions that don't bother me very much that God labels as sins, and there are things that chap my hide but are not condemned by Him. I think pineapple on pizza ought to be classed as an abomination, but Jesus declared all foods clean, so there I am.

More seriously, there are plenty of people out there with serious, serious problems with portions of the word of God. Their problems are so serious that they go hunting for reasons to become atheists, just so that they won't feel obliged to keep that abhorrent commandment. Sometimes, it's not even something that they have to do. They

just don't like that God said it, so they leave.

This is not a new problem. Indeed, it is clearly on display in [John 6](#). Contextually, Jesus' ministry has reached a high point after His feeding of the five thousand. Throngs of new disciples think so highly of Him that they want to make Him king by force.

In response, Jesus preaches one of the most alienating sermons of His ministry. Among other things, He tells His disciples that they have to eat His flesh and drink His blood if they want to inherit eternal life. 2000 years later, this is still a difficult concept, and its effect on its immediate hearers is predictable. His new followers desert Him in droves, grumbling that His teaching is too hard to understand.

I doubt this result was accidental. I'm sure Jesus would have been pleased if the crowds were sufficiently devoted enough to stick around even though they didn't understand what He was saying, but He knew they weren't. He made such challenging statements in order to separate those who were truly committed from those who weren't.

Today, God's word continues to serve the same function. I've never met anyone who was upset by the content of [John 6](#), but I have studied with those who stumble over baptism, sexual morality, and marriage. Others don't like what the Bible says about authority. Still others would rather zero in on grace and ignore Scriptural teaching on obedience.

Sooner or later, all of us are going to run into a hard saying in Scripture, something that we don't want to do or don't want to believe. That's not in question. The question is what we will do when it happens. Either we turn tail like most of the disciples in [John 6](#), or we struggle on regardless:

If we want to be pleasing to God, though, this choice is no choice at all. Either we submit to Jesus in everything, whether we understand it, whether we like it, or we submit to Him in nothing. If we pick and choose from His precepts, we have removed Him as Lord and set ourselves in His place.

The temptation to do so can be severe. If we decide to reject the words of Christ, the devil will hand us half a dozen justifications for doing so in a heartbeat. We must remember, though, that the troublesome issue really isn't what's at issue. It's just a tool that the devil is using to get what he really wants — our souls. As long as he can separate us from Jesus, any method will serve.

That's the decision that we have to make, then — whether we want Jesus to save us or not. If we do, we will accept Him, hard sayings and all, because there is no other option. Peter says lots of dumb things in the course of the gospels, but in [John 6:68](#), he gets it exactly right. He asks, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Next to those words, the hard words pale into insignificance.

Are We Trusting God or Testing God?

Author Unknown

"Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" ([Matthew 4:5-7](#)).

Jesus quotes from [Deuteronomy 6:16](#), where Moses is recounting the struggles of the children of Israel as they came out of Egypt and began to murmur and complain about not having water. They were not trusting God to take care of them but instead tested God to try to force His hand. These two ideas tend to run counter to each other: if we are not trusting God, we will likely be testing Him. If we are not submitting to God, we may indeed be trying to manipulate Him to do what we want.

Jesus applied this principle to the situation He was facing. In the case of the devil tempting Him, it was not about wanting water and thinking to go back to Egypt; it was about whether or not God would keep Jesus from harm if He jumped off the pinnacle of the temple. The principle was the same, and it had to do with how He would handle a test of His own. The devil even quoted Scripture to make his case (just because Scripture is used is no guarantee it is being applied correctly).

Testing God can happen in a number of ways. We might be testing whether or not God will keep us safe in a certain circumstance, so we put ourselves in unnecessary danger. We might wonder if God will provide for us in some way, so we purposefully refuse to make reasonable provisions. We can even be testing God through our constant worries about daily provisions (see [Matthew 6:24-33](#)).

The open door for testing God appears to be when we ourselves are tested, tempted, and perhaps frustrated. If we get sick, for example, and are tempted to give up, how will we handle that? Will we shake a fist at God and think that if He really loves us He will make it go away? Will we put ourselves in His hands and rest on the notion that this situation may be a way to glorify God and influence others for good?

Trusting God does not mean that we do not need to plan, make provisions for the future, or take precautions in dangerous situations. It does mean that we do the best we can with what we have in line with what we know to be His will, make appropriate provisions, then not worry about it. We know that in whatever happens, He will take care of us (cf. [1 Peter 5:5-6](#); [Philippians 4:4-7](#)).

There were times when God's people were at serious risk. Daniel trusted God when threatened concerning his prayer life. Daniel's friends trusted God under threat of

being cast into a furnace. Paul trusted God under threat of imprisonment and death. There are multiple examples. They were not throwing caution to the wind, but they were ready to suffer for the Lord.

Motivation is key. Am I just trying to make some point, or am I truly trying to glorify God and show my love for others? Am I trying to bring attention to myself, or am I really pointing others to the Lord because I care about them? Am I testing whether God will do something for me in the time-frame I desire, or am I trusting that God will work things out in His own time and in His own way? Am I demanding some kind of sign to appear just as I say, or am I content to know that God is able to do far more abundantly beyond anything I can ask or think ([Ephesians 3:20](#))?

My faith must not be conditioned so that it is strong only when things go the way that I think they ought to go. Instead, I must trust God no matter what the circumstances of life may bring. In the end, if I trust Him, I know that He will make it work out in the best possible way. For those who love Him and seek His will, He makes things work for the good, even when what is happening is not what we might prefer (cf. [Romans 8:28](#)). Suffering for the cause of Christ is included (cf. [I Peter 4:1](#); [Philippians 3:10](#)).

When Paul faced particularly dangerous circumstances, he considered himself delivered by God “from the lion’s mouth.” Yet he also saw that there was ultimate deliverance coming: “*The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*” ([II Timothy 4:18](#)).

Commit to trusting God and reject the testing mentality. “*And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you...*” ([Deuteronomy 6:18](#)).

Don’t Pile on Trouble

By Terry Wane Benton

Sufficient for today is its own trouble ([Matthew 6:34](#)). Deal one day at a time. Don’t fill your day with more than is necessary. Trying to carry worries about today **and** tomorrow is too much stress for today. Deal with one day at a time. One foot in front of the other, you can handle today. It is not constructive to the joy of today to add worry and fears about things we cannot control, and tomorrow is not yet under our control. Make today the best you can make it, and then repeat as tomorrow becomes today again. This is what Jesus is teaching us in this text. Let’s believe and act under this divine perspective.