

The God of the Bible - Part 1

by Richard Owen Roberts

The sermon emphasizes the existence and nature of one God, revealed through the conscience, nature, and Holy Scripture.

Duration: 36:42

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:6-7, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:28-29, Mark 12:32

Topics: "Character Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the two ways in which God reveals Himself to humanity: through the conscience and through nature. He emphasizes that everything that exists and happens has a cause, and this principle is unwavering. The preacher uses examples like the sound of a frog croaking and the beauty of flowers and the sunrise to illustrate the wonders of God's creation. However, he also acknowledges that when the conscience is feared and the heart is hardened, these natural witnesses fail to function. The preacher concludes by highlighting that humanity is responsible for their conduct and should not reject the knowledge of God that is evident in both conscience and nature.

Transcript

The Gospel of Mark, the passage beginning at verse 28. Now, just by way of background, while you are finding your place, we find in this section of Mark a considerable number of details concerning controversy, controversy in which our Lord Jesus was involved with the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Mark chapter 12.

The scribes, of course, and the Sadducees, the Pharisees were in disagreement among themselves. And some of them had the idea that not only could they manage to hang Jesus, but they might also upset their rival party and have Jesus somehow say or do something that would both bring doom upon his own head and put under the antagonist. So that the passage we're about to read, Mark 12 at verse 28, is picking up on one of these controversial issues, and it begins with one of the scribes asking Jesus an intensely important question.

One of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, the first of all the commandments is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment, and the second is like, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none

other commandment greater than thee.

And the scribe said unto him, well, master, thou hast said the truth, for there is one God, and there is none other but he. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the soul and with all the strength and to love neighbor as himself is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, thou art not far from the kingdom of God.

And no man after that durst ask him any question. Now, on the surface, it might almost appear that this scribe's question was intended merely to raise controversy. If you have read the parallel account in Matthew's gospel, you're aware of the fact, I'm sure, that Matthew tells us that the man asked the question intending to tempt Jesus in doing so.

So, there is little doubt that what he was participating in this back and forth controversy between the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees and would have been pleased enough, it would seem, to do something to trip Christ up. And yet the response that the man makes is truly remarkable, so remarkable, in fact, that our Lord says something concerning him which is most unusual, thou art not far from the kingdom. But the question the man asks, which is first among all the commandments, if you're thinking of 10 commandments, that's almost a minor question.

But if you, like other rabbis, are thinking in terms of the 613 commandments, which the rabbis had collated, and you're asking which is first, it's obviously a much more important question. Now, with the 613 commandments that they had and laid on one another, 248 of them were positive commandments and 365 of them were negative. Now, some of us right here in this room would have great difficulty this morning reciting the 10 commandments.

How would we do with 613? It would be an almost impossible task to remember what they were and then to sort them out and keep them straight and put the first first and the last last would be a task of immeasurable difficulty. So his question is a wise question, though obviously a tempting question. And our Lord's response is a very wise response and a crystal clear response.

And the fact that his response is crystal clear is readily demonstrated by the fact that the scribe immediately understood what Jesus said. Now, Jesus didn't always speak in such a way that people immediately understood, you know, as well as I do. He often used a parable and he used parables to confound and to kind of color issues in such a way that only those on the inside were able to perceive what he was talking about.

But here his response is ever so plain. You ask me, says Jesus, which is the first commandment? I tell you plainly what the first commandment is. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.

But notice, if you will, going back to this text, how our Lord introduces his answer in verse 29. Here, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Now, if you're acquainted with the law as recorded in the Old Testament, you know that this is a direct vocation which our Lord makes from the sixth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy.

If we had an abundance of time this morning, I think it would be of immense profit if we were to go back to Deuteronomy and read chapters 5 and 6 and 7 together, and there we would find the setting in which these words first appear. But just now, in a brief sketch, in those portions, 5, 6, and 7 of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is once again rehearsing the commandments which were given to him on the

mount, and he repeats the ten commandments as such. But then, under the inspiration of God, he lays upon the people their duty in keeping these commandments, and he gives some very severe warnings concerning what happens to those who are neglectful, as far as the commandments are concerned.

But in a way that cannot be misunderstood, he introduces this statement that the Lord our God is one Lord, in such a way as to make it altogether clear in that setting that nothing else that was said on the mount is of even minor significance in comparison with the commandment that deals with our direct responsibility to God himself. So, our Lord, in short, gives an answer that is absolutely perfectly in keeping with the law as recorded in the Old Testament. Now, if you will look again now at the response of this scribe.

The scribe said, verse 32, Well, master, thou hast said the truth, for there is one God. Now, that is what we must focus our attention upon this morning. There is one God.

That is not news to us. We have embraced that concept long ago. But in beginning this series of studies on God himself, it is well to ask ourselves immediately, is my understanding of this concept of one God adequate? And is my loyalty to this God sufficient? And am I allowing what this one God says to be primary in my life? Now, I trust that all of us are sufficiently aware of biblical argument to realize that in the book of Romans, starting right in the first chapter, the matter of God is resolved both for those who have Bibles and for those who don't.

But in the event that your awareness of the argument is laid down there is inadequate, let me repeat in part what is declared. In the first chapter of the book of Romans, it is stated by Paul that there are two means by which men know God. Naturally.

First of all, in the conscience. And secondly, by the observation of the handiwork of God in nature itself. Now, the unseared conscience of the natural man testifies that there is indeed a God.

If, in short, it were possible to take a child from birth and isolate that child from all human influences, from books and radios and television and people, from influences of every form, if it were possible to isolate that child and yet to have that child grow up to maturity, that child would know within itself, without ever having been told by anyone, that there was indeed a God. For built right within the conscience of humankind is an awareness of the existence of someone greater than themselves. Now, you know, as I do, by pure nature that we are here, that we didn't get here by chance, that we didn't make ourselves, that our lives are not an accident, that we were not made by others like us.

I know that none of you is capable of having made me, and you know I couldn't have made you. Just by nature we are aware of these things. We know by nature that someone greater than ourselves made us.

Paul lays this down as truth in Romans chapter one. And because we know by nature that someone greater than ourselves made us, we also know that this one who made us is worthy of our praise and adoration. And we know that by nature.

Now, in that first chapter, Paul explains that man is not willing to abide by what he knows by nature. He will not retain God in his conscience. He rejects what he knows, and he turns the image of God that is implanted in his own mind and heart, and in his conscience, he turns this into something corruptible.

And as Paul explains in the first chapter, a man who has this deep inner conviction that someone greater than himself made him takes a piece of wood or a stone, and with a hammer and a chisel or some other

tool, he carves some kind of a creation of his own, and then he puts that thing that he has made on a pedestal or in a place of prominence, and he bows down and he worships it. Now, Paul introduces this information to demonstrate that men everywhere are responsible for their conduct. Now, his purpose is a little different than our purpose this morning.

His purpose is to prove that all are sinners. And of course, that answers very well the question of what happens to the heathen who've never heard of Christ. It's very adequately explained.

If a man, by his own conscience, knows that someone greater than himself made him, and yet knowing that, he turns around and makes something with his own hands and bows down and worships what he himself made, he has violated his conscience. So, whether he ever heard the name of God, ever had a Bible in his hand, or had addressed to the attention of his ears a single word concerning God as revealed in Holy Scripture, nonetheless, he is a sinner because he knows he has violated his own conscience in bowing down and worshiping that which he himself has made. Now, Paul adds another line, and that is that in addition to having this registration of God in the conscience, all those with eyes are able to behold the handiwork of God.

And the seeing of what God has done impresses the individual with the awareness that some being greater, more powerful, more wonderful than himself, was responsible. How could you look into a bouquet of flowers, even if, as these, they're a bit wilted? How could you look into them without some sense that some being with magnificent imagination and unlimited power was responsible for that creation? Just look at the variety that appears in these few flowers that are here this morning. Step out in the morning and see the sunrise.

Go out in the evening and see the multitude of stars. You cannot spend time in nature without having impressed upon you an awareness that nobody that you know, humanly, has the capacity to produce such wondrous work as exists all around us. And if you sit in your easy chair and contemplate yourself, and think of the wonderful way your mind works, and the ability of your fingers and your toes, and the ability of the body to renew itself time after time, these things all added together say someone greater than yourself is responsible for all this.

So we have, as the theologians say, the knowledge or the testimony of God that comes to us, both through the conscience and through the observation of that which God has done in nature itself. Now, of course, when the conscience is seared and the heart is hardened, then these natural witnesses fail to function. But may I ask you to reflect now more deeply upon these two matters I've set before you.

The heavens, we are told, declare the glory of God in the firmament, show us his handiwork, Psalm 19.1. The invisible things of him from the creation of the world, says Paul, are clearly seen, and they are understood by the things that are made, even God's eternal power and his Godhead. Thus, people, says Paul, are without excuse. Now, let's take these two revelations of God in the conscience and in nature, and think upon them.

Let me state now a principle that is unwavering. Will you listen carefully? For everything that is and for everything that happens, there is a cause. Let me repeat that.

For everything that is and for everything that happens, there is a cause. Now, did you immediately think when I did that of a frog croaking? You saw what I did, and you heard what I did, and you know that the noise that was produced by the movement of my hands, one against another, was the natural or expected

result. Here is the cause, and what you hear is the effect.

Now, you sit there where you behold these windows. Is there anybody in beholding those windows who said to themselves, isn't it remarkable that such an assortment of colors and shapes and sizes of glass and lead just fell together in those unusual patterns in that place? Well, no one is so absurd as to suppose that those things just happened there, or that when the builder got done erecting the building, he had a lot of trash he threw up in the air, and it landed in that way. We don't think that way, for we think that for every effect there is a cause, and we know good and well that those stained glass windows fell into those unusual and attractive patterns not by chance, but by the laborious effort of someone who assembled them with a plan in mind, someone who was skilled and dedicated, who labored and labored and labored until he had achieved the precise result that he desired.

I repeat the principle, for everything that is, and for everything that happens, there is a cause. Now, if you're not too far removed from little children, you know that they believe this. I was remembering yesterday a drive that I took years ago from Schenectady, New York to Syracuse, and I took with me a little girl, a niece.

I do not know how many times she said, Uncle Dick, why? Uncle Dick, how? But for everything it seems she laid her eyes upon, she wanted to know the why and the how and the who of it. Well, who made that car? Why is that tree green? Why do the clouds look like that, Uncle Dick? How come it isn't raining now? Question after question after question, all declaring that in her mind there is always a connection between the effect and the cause, that you don't have effect without cause. In all the normal activities of our lives, we demonstrate our acceptance of this principle.

We eat to gain strength. With that strength, we go out and work to gain pleasure and to gain profit and to get tired. And when we're tired, we go to bed to get rest, that we might get up and eat and work.

But everything we do is tied in with a principle of cause and effect. You can't deny it. It would take the most foolish of all men to deny that there is a relationship between what is and what caused it to be.

Now, I'm standing here. You can see me. You can hear me.

You could come up and touch me. You might even be able to smell me. Hopefully not.

You can even comprehend what I say. Now, you know that the words that you are now hearing are now being spoken. You know that these words have not existed in this room forever.

And you know that these words cannot exist without a cause. You see me moving my hands while I speak. And you are aware that the words that are spoken and the movements that are being made are being made by an individual, by a person.

There is a relationship between what you see, what you hear, and the cause. I am the cause of the noise falling on your ear right now and the motion moving before your eyes. It's quite understandable.

Nobody puzzles over that or marvels over it. Nothing exists without a cause. But listen to this.

Everything that exists has been produced by a cause sufficient thereto. Let me explain. If I have a feeble little voice, I can only produce feeble little sounds.

But if I have a powerful voice, I can fill this room with noise to the point where your ears hurt. If I'm one of those incompetent handymen, I may produce a miserable little doghouse. But if I'm a genuine craftsman, I may be able to create an exquisite piece of furniture that you stand and look at with wonder and delight or a truly magnificent mansion.

Everything that exists has been produced by a cause sufficient thereto. It cannot be otherwise. Now, goldfish can swim around in the bowl, but they can't make the bowl.

And if somehow in their play they leap out of the bowl, they can't leap back in. And they can't even change their own water. Dogs have the capacity to gladden their master's heart, but they can't raise their food to put in their own bowl.

Men have the ability, the capacity to build cities, but they can't create the building materials themselves out of nothing. And when they've built their cities out of God's provision, they don't even have the capacity to live together in the city harmoniously at all times. Everything that exists has been produced by a cause that is sufficient thereto.

Now, if you will push this thrice repeated principle to its logical conclusion, you will see that every honest thinking person must come to the point where they say, someone made me. Someone who is greater than I am. Someone who has the capacity to produce.

I am the effect. Here I stand. There you sit.

We are not freaks or accidents of nature. We were made, and we were made by a being that had the capacity to produce us. And that being must be greater than we are.

For if he were not greater than we are, he could not have done what he has done. Now, everyone who is willing, everyone who is willing can come to that much information concerning God. People who have no Bible, people who have never been preached to or ministered to by missionaries can come to that kind of information.

For God reveals himself in the mind and the heart of man, and he shows himself in nature. And man simply reasoning through what God has shown can arrive at the crystal clear realization that there is a being greater than himself who made him. There have always been in the world one class of individuals who willfully reject this principle, this principle of cause and effect.

In doing so, they violate their conscience. They violate the revelation of God in nature, and they trespass against their own reason. The Bible labels this class of people fools.

And we would do well to reserve that term always for this one class of individuals, fools. The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. And having said that, he chucks aside all evidence to the contrary and abides by a notion that is absurd and erroneous.

But thank God, it is not necessary to be a fool. All of us can rejoice in the realization that a being greater than ourselves made us. But from our conscience and from the revelation of God in nature and from the exercise of our reason, we are still left with a very inadequate knowledge.

And thus God, in his infinite love and gracious mercy, determined to give us a more complete revelation of himself. And that he has done in the form of Holy Scripture. Now, in the Bible, we learn not only as our

Lord Jesus declared to that lawyer, there is one God, but we learn who God is.

We learn the name by which we are to address him. We learn about his work. We learn about his character.

We learn about his plan. We learn about his purpose. And we learn about his demand.

Our Lord makes it ever so plain there is only one God. He is not divided. He is without separate parts.

When we speak of God having manifested himself as Father, as Son, as Holy Spirit, we are not saying there are three gods or that God exists in three separate divisions. There is one God and only one. There is no other God beside him.

None exist. And if we weigh this simple truth adequately, we will then come to understand why it is. First, that in the detailing of the Ten Commandments as recorded in Exodus 20, the two commandments directly affecting God are placed at the front of the list and accompanied with warnings so severe that no thinking person would ever thoughtfully violate the demands laid down there.

One can hardly come to grips with our Lord's statement here to the scribe without facing the fact that because there is one God, any form of consideration of any other God is absolute absurdity. Now, in Exodus 20, in that first commandment, we are told plainly that he is a jealous God. Now, if you will reflect upon that, you will see that that does not mark a bad trait in God, but a very sensible trait.

If there is only one God, and there is assuredly only one God, then anything I do by way of registering interest in other gods is sheer nonsense. Now, all other gods are either mere figments of the imagination of man or the works of man's hand. They can't be otherwise.

There's no possibility of there being any other than one God. If you go right back to the principle I have been urging upon you, the principle of cause and effect, if you had 30 gods, you would still have to ask where they all came from. And was there one of the 30 that created the other? Now, of course, there are not 30.

There is but one, and he describes himself as a jealous God. He says he cannot and he will not tolerate man making any likeness of himself, and he absolutely forbids all worship and all service to any gods whatsoever which are not. And all gods are not, save the living and true God.

And further, he clearly promises vengeance upon any and all who violate this commandment, and he severely warns against any profane use even of his name. And again, in connection with the reverence of his name, he once more attaches a grave warning to offenders. The thing that we must see as we conclude this morning is what our Lord made ever so plain to the scribes.

The Lord our God, he is one God. And I'm sure you know these words, thou shalt love the Lord thy God. Now, we are commanded how we are to love him.

We are told plainly that we are to love him with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind, and with all the strength. And to love God less than this is the gravest violation of all the commandments. To commit murder is nothing in comparison with not loving God as we are.

There is no sin, however heinous, in the eyes of man that can compare in its seriousness with a violation of love for God. We need to ask ourselves now, in this first consideration of this subject of God, do I love

him as he commands? Will you ask yourself that? Is your love for God adequate? Do you love him with all your heart? Now, the heart we understand to be the center of our being and personality. Suppose there is something else in the center.

Suppose your children are in the center. Suppose your business is in the center. Suppose the writing of books is in the center.

Suppose the keeping of your household. Suppose some plan or purpose is there. Obviously, we cannot love God with all our heart if anything else is in the center.

God must be center. Do you wake up in the morning with an awareness that above everything else, first and foremost in all your planning and thinking for the day, is the desire to love and serve God as he ought to be loved and served? If not, you live in violation of this first commandment. We are commanded to love him with all our souls, and surely we know that the soul is that which animates the body, that which gives life to the body.

Could you say that all that gives life to you revolves around God? That there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in your life so important, so urgent, to which you are so deeply committed as the love of God. We are commanded to love God with all our minds. Now, is it true that you do? You find yourself constantly focusing upon God and his glory, and worshiping and serving and praising him with all of your mind? Or do you discover a large portion of your day in which God is forgotten and pushed aside? Do you love him with all your strength? Do you pour your energies into his service? Do you sacrifice yourself in order to lift up his holy name and exalt him and demonstrate the fact that you, with this scribe, are convinced that the love of God is first and foremost? Did you notice the scribe's words? To love God with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, with all the strength, and to love neighbor as self, these are more than all the whole burnt sacrifices or offerings, more than the entire system of religion, more than anything you can do.

To love God is worth more than to be here, worth more than any form of service you render or worship you give, first and foremost, above all else, to love God. Father in heaven, grant that in these weeks to come, as we contemplate the revelation you have made concerning yourself, that increasingly we shall find swelling up within our entire being love to you, love that shall be all-encompassing, love that shall be overwhelming, love that shall be life-transforming. Grant that each one who has shared here this morning shall find themselves captured by the love of God.

In that blessed and holy name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

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