

Neither Scrooge Nor Santa

Joe Slater

Our concept of God naturally shapes our religious views. Tell me how you perceive God, and I can predict accurately much of your approach to religion. Unfortunately, not everyone's concept of God is Biblical. As with most other topics, people tend to take extreme views in regard to God's nature.

Centuries ago, the dominant view in this country portrayed God as an angry tyrant, somewhat analogous to Ebenezer Scrooge. Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," promoted the concept that God was vindictive, harsh, merciless, and even sadistic in His dealings with humankind. Such one-sided and exaggerated teaching during the "Great Awakening" inspired fear within its hearers, to be sure. Some in the audience would faint, while others foamed at the mouth, rolled in the aisles, or went into convulsions. Tragically, they were not given a Biblical answer in their quest for God's mercy and forgiveness.

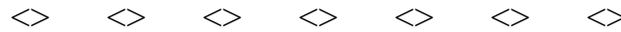
Today, the popular version of God resembles Santa more than Scrooge. Exaggerating and perverting His love and grace, this view practically ignores God's justice and wrath altogether. Of course He will give you whatever you want – He loves you, doesn't He? Sure, He knows whether you've been naughty or nice, but in the final analysis, it makes no difference. Unless you've been exceptionally naughty (serial murderer, devil-worshipper), He will still give you the presents. He just said all that stuff about Hell to try to get you to straighten up a little; He didn't really mean it!

Such a garbled grasp of God produces careless "Christianity." Spiritually sloppy philosophies like "don't sweat the small stuff" spring from the Santa concept. People actually believe that as long as they are more or

less sincere and don't do anything outrageously wicked, their eternal bliss is secure!

The Biblical view of God matches neither Santa nor Scrooge. God is neither a vindictive tyrant nor a jolly, laid-back "good time Charlie." Rather, He is the infinitely holy, totally loving, absolutely righteous creator. He is both loving Father and righteous judge. As Paul wrote, "*Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God*" (Romans 11:22).

Faithful Christians may have complete confidence in the grace and mercy of God. However, those who have not obeyed the gospel, or have not continued walking in the light of His word, should not deceive themselves with false hope. Let us cultivate a Biblical understanding of the nature of God, so that we may serve Him acceptably with reverence and godly fear.



Money

A couple stood on their driveway in an affluent neighborhood. Looking at their neighbor's house, the husband said: "They don't have a boat or an RV. They've never been to Colorado on a skiing vacation. They don't have a vacation home. Their cars are several years old. They must be loaded with money!"

There is a proverb about that. "*One pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth*" (Proverbs 13:7).

A related saying: "The number one quality of successful people is living below their means."

Another: "Why do we spend money we don't have, to buy things we don't need, to impress people we don't like?"

Via *Preacher Talk*

The All-Seeing Eye

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3).

J. M. Henson put it best, saying, "All along on the road to the soul's true abode, there's an eye watching you. Every step that you take, this great eye is awake . . . there's an all seeing eye watching you."

As a kid, sermons about the eyes of God seeing my actions really made an impression, and have continued to do so even today. That eye, along with His ear, move my conscience and keep me aware to the point of provoking guilt.

My mother and teachers seemed to have eyes in the back of their heads. And, since I have one of those knots on the back of my head, stories grew among my students about how I managed to see what troubles they were causing in back of me in the classroom.

The omniscience of God is frightening to the evil-doer; and it ought to be, because God's eyes are more searching and knowledgeable than our own mothers. In Ecclesiastes 12:14, we're reminded: "God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil."

A Christian told of being in Army basic training and missed some worship services. Sitting in the recreation hall with his buddies, he watched as two civilians in three-piece suits came in and inquired at the desk. With a sense of foreboding, he saw the duty clerk point to him. As the men walked toward him, he said to his companions, "'Oh, oh, it's Sunday and Mama's found me."

God's ability to see our good and bad is also comforting, as it was designed to be. He has assured us that not one sparrow will fall that He does not notice, nor a hair lost from our head. He sees every good deed and records it (Matthew 10:42), and He ". . . will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:3). Is His eye terrifying or comforting? It appears it depends entirely on us.

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