

July 7, 2019

Thinking That God is Like Man!

(v. 16) *“But to the wicked God says: What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth, (17) Seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? (18) When you saw a thief, you consented with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers. (19) You given your mouth to evil, And your tongue frames deceit. (20) You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother’s son. (21) These things you have done, and I kept silent; **You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes,**” (Psalm 50:16-21).*

The 50th Psalm is one of 12 psalms attributed to Asaph (Ps. 50,73-83). It begins with the affirmation that *“The Mighty One, God the Lord has spoken,”* v. 1. In the first six verses the power, *“perfection,”* and *“righteousness”* of God is set forth. In verses 7-15 God is depicted as speaking to *“My people,”* and in verses 16-21 God is speaking to *“the wicked.”* *“The wicked”* in these verses, contextually speaking, must not be regarded as being atheists or as being completely non-religious. After all, they did presume to *“declare”* God’s *“statutes,”* and to take God’s *“covenant”* in their *“mouth”* (v. 16). But the amazing thing regarding these people (*“the wicked”*) the Psalmist stated that they thought that God *“was altogether like”* them (v. 21). In other words, they tended to measure God by themselves! They had an entirely false concept of God.

However, lest we be too harsh toward *“the wicked”* to whom Asaph directed these remarks, I think it appropriate to mention the fact that *“there is nothing new under the sun,”* and that *“that which has been is what will be”* (Eccl. 1:9). The mind set of *“the wicked”* addressed in Ps.50:16-21) is reflected in multitudes today, whose attitude and conduct is parallel to that of those addressed in our opening text, and who think that God is *“altogether”* like them! In fact, I suggest that one of the greatest problems we have today in convincing people to accept God’s word and to give their lives in humble, obedient service to God lies in the fact that people in general possess the wrong concept of God. This is the issue which we shall seek to address in this article.

But lest we get ahead of ourselves, let us first consider *“the wicked”* whom Asaph addressed and described in these verses.

Note, please, that he specifically called them *“the wicked,”* v. 16. But **why** were they called *“wicked?”* In part, because they presumed to *“declare”* God’s *“statutes”* and took His *“covenant”* in their *“mouth,”* but they hated *“instruction”* and cast God’s *“words behind”* themselves (v. 17). Their lives and their teaching did not begin to match up! In other words, they were hypocrites! Furthermore, they *“consented”* with thieves, they were partakers *“with adulterers;”* they spoke *“evil against”* their brethren, and slandered their *“own mother’s son,”* v. 18-20. Compare Ps. 50:18-20 with Ex.20:13-15, and you will discover that, among other sins, they broke commandments seven, eight, and nine of the ten commandments!

God said, *“these things you have done, and I kept silent; **You thought that I was altogether like you...**”* Ps. 50:21. You see, they had misinterpreted the patience and long-suffering of God! They had grievously sinned, and God had momentarily *“kept silent;”* hence,

they concluded that God was “*altogether like*” them! This was indeed a tragic mistake! Because God had not immediately punished them for their transgressions, they assumed that He was as indifferent to sin as they were. Obviously, they had forgotten the message set forth in Gen. 6:5 which mentions the people prior to the Great Flood; the text says “*the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*” Consequently, God sent the Great flood which destroyed every person on earth with the exception of “*eight souls*” (1 Pet. 3:20), who were in the ark, namely Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives (Genesis 6-8)! Yes, God had said “*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever,*” Gen. 6:3, but the pre-flood population did not get the message, even though Noah, a “*preacher of righteousness*” (2 Peter 2:5) was in their midst. No doubt they misinterpreted the longsuffering of God (Gen. 6:3) as being reflective of divine indifference. But when God sent the flood upon “*the world of the ungodly*” (2 Pet. 2:5) they learned (the hard way!) that God hates sin and that sinners sooner or later reap what they sow (Gal. 6:7)!

But getting back to our original text in which God, through Asaph, addressed the wicked, saying, “*You thought I was altogether like you...*,” Ps. 50:21. In addition to that which has already been mentioned, we now cite some other ways in which “*the wicked*”

Think that God is Like Them:

1. Many think that since man can hide from man he can do the same before God.

Adam and Eve, after they sinned tried to hide “*themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden,*” Gen. 3:8, but they were completely unsuccessful. One lesson we should all learn is that “*all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account,*” Heb. 4:13.

2. Man deceives man, so many believe they can deceive God. At a time when many Christians were being very generous in alleviating the needs of fellow saints, Ananias and Sapphira his wife apparently wanted the recognition for generosity but they did not want to make the sacrifice it requires. So they sold a piece of property, kept back part of the proceeds for themselves, and brought “*a certain part and laid it at the apostles’ feet,*” Acts 5:3, seeking to leave the impression that they had given all. Peter asked Ananias, “*why has Satan filled our heart to lie to the Holy Spirit,*” Acts 5:3, and then said “*you have not lied to men but to God,*” Acts 5:4. Both Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, lost their lives that day as a result. Sometimes we are able to deceive men, but we are never able to deceive God!

3. People are often slack in their word, so many tend to believe that God is also slack in His word. Old Testament prophets again and again warned the Israelites of the consequences they would incur if they turned back from God and served idols (Deut. 30:15-19; 2 Kings 25:1-11, etc.), but they apparently didn’t believe that God meant what He said — that is, until they were repeatedly taken captive by hostile enemy forces! One lesson we should all learn is clearly set forth in Isa. 55:11, wherein God said “*So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please.*” God’s “*word is truth,*” John 17:17, and God “*cannot lie,*” Tit. 1:2. Hence, God does not make empty promises, nor does He make idle threats!

4. Many look upon sin as being a harmless endeavor, so they often believe that God views sin in similar fashion. This seems especially evident at some funerals. The deceased may have been a known liar, adulterer, alcoholic, etc., but the preacher “preaches him right into heaven” (or so it appears that way). But God hates “*lawlessness,*” Heb. 1:9. He even refers to certain sins as being an “*abomination to Him*” (Prov. 6:16-19; Lev. 18:26-30; 20:13, etc.). God is not indifferent to sin! Sin alienates people from God, Isa. 59:1-2, and “*the wages of sin is death,*” Rom.6:23. Sin is an insult to the infinite holiness of God. The fact that it took nothing less than

the sacrificial death of Jesus to atone for sin, Rom. 3:23-25, necessarily infers that God, by His very nature, cannot be indifferent to sin! In fact, all sinners who do not obey the gospel will be *“punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,”* 2 Thess. 1:9. There is nothing harmless about sin!

5. Many regard “one religion as good as another,” so they think God feels the same way. However, both the Old and New Testaments contain many warnings against both false teachers and false religions. But Jesus said *“every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted,”* Matt. 15:13. Matthew 7:21-23 reveals that there will be many judgment day surprises. Any time a person violates the law of God he is practicing *“lawlessness,”* and to all who practice lawlessness, Jesus in that last day will say *“depart from Me,”* Matt. 7:23. Jesus died to purchase His church, Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25, so you can be sure that He will not look with indifference upon those churches built by men, and those religions founded by men!

6. Many sinners (even those who know they are lost) often feel that they “have plenty of time yet,” so they put off obedience to the gospel of Christ, apparently believing that God feels the same way. Many are like the rich farmer of Luke 12:16-20, who thought He had *“many years”* to enjoy life while ignoring God, but he died that very night! God, through His word lets us know that we *“do not know what a day may bring forth,”* Prov. 27:1, and He likens our lives to a vapor that passes away in a short time, James 4:13-15.

Conclusion: Yes, there are many examples that could be cited to show that so many think that God is *“altogether like”* them, but they could not be more wrong. God is the great *“I AM,”* Ex. 3:14. He is infinitely *“holy,”* Lev., 11:44,45. He is *“Almighty,”* Gen. 17:17. He is *“from everlasting to everlasting,”* Ps. 90:2. *“His understanding is infinite,”* Ps.147:5. Some day before Him *“each of us shall give account,”* Rom. 14:12. Let us love, honor, respect, and obey God, but let us never make the mistake of thinking that **He** is like us! —B. Witherington
