

## GOD: THE MEANS OR THE END?

By Jonathan Duttweiler

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When I was in college (many years ago!) I attended a college and career age Sunday School class in my home Church. One Sunday we had a visitor from out of town, a young man who professed to being a "born again" Christian. At the time we were studying Jerry Bridges' book, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, and were discussing what it was that attracted other people to Christ. Most of us involved in the study said it was by the way we lived as Christians. This young man expressed some consternation over the emphasis some of us made that it was seeing the holiness of God in people's lives that attracted others (non-believers) to Christ. He felt that it was God's blessings, the material prosperity God showers upon His children, that attracted others. This was a precursor to the explosive outbreak of the so-called "prosperity gospel", though I did not realize it then.

A. W. Tozer pointed out long ago that it seemed that *popular* Christianity's most effective "selling point" is that God exists to help people get ahead in this world. Preacher after preacher exhort their hearers to "accept" Christ because of the joy, peace, or prosperity that being a child of God brings. Evangelists urge congregations to receive Jesus so they can escape hell. Slogans confront us with the claim that salvation is "eternal life insurance" or "heavenly fire insurance." Everywhere we look people are proclaiming "come to God and get!"

But God declares that He must be sought for HIMSELF! -- never as a means toward something else. You see, scripture tells us that God is never found in this manner. In fact, Jeremiah declared, speaking for the Almighty, "And you will seek me and find me, when you search for me with ALL your heart." Whoever seeks God as a means toward an end, no matter how grand, how noble, how glorious or worthy, will never find God!

The Bible reveals to us that God is Himself the end for which humanity was created. Revelation 4:11 trumpets forth: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou has created all things, and FOR THY PLEASURE they are and were created." Yet there is a philosophy pervading our society which says man is his own end. All of us are, by now, familiar with Secular Humanism. This philosophy teaches that man's happiness is the supreme end, that God does not exist and that belief in Him is, in fact, dangerous. Nothing matters but the ultimate happiness of man. With this kind of philosophy we can only assume that the "end justifies whatever means are necessary" i.e. whatever induces happiness in a person is alright. Even a highly respected "father" of our country, Thomas Jefferson, wrote that "life, liberty, and the PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS" were inalienable rights. This philosophy, this quest for happiness at any cost, has become so pervasive that religion is now seen by many with this end in view: God exists to please man and the goal of religious faith is to benefit man!

But Jesus declares we are not to love ourselves with all our being but to love GOD with all our heart. "You shall love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, with ALL your

soul, and with ALL your mind." The Psalmist reveals this same attitude in Psalm 73: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And BESIDES THEE, I DESIRE NOTHING on earth." Would that we all learn to have this attitude! Luke tells the story of a lawyer who came to Jesus seeking the secret to eternal life. "What must I do to have eternal life?", the lawyer asks. Jesus replies, "What does the Law say?" The Law says "You shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind." Jesus declares, "Do this, and you will live." Love God with ALL your heart, not part of your heart, or even with the major portion of it, but with all your heart.

Bernard of Clairvaux begins a treatise on the love of God by asking the question "Why should we love God?" He answers, because He is God! Being who He is, God is to be loved for His own sake! Not because we'll go to heaven when we die. Not because He prospers us or protects us from sorrow. Daniel tells of Shadrack, Meshack, and Abendnego. They refused to compromise and serve the gods of Babylon and so were to be thrown into the fiery furnace. The king gave them one last chance to change their minds but they declared, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us...But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods ..." What a wonderful declaration! Even if God does not meet our expectations, even if He does not grant our happiness, even if He does not give us peace, or joy, or material prosperity, we are not going to compromise and serve other gods who you say will! We will worship God, not because of what He does for us, but because of Who He is! This is the direct antithesis of the religion of pragmatism that pervades the Church today that emphasizes "whatever works!"

We might pause here to reflect and rejoice that God's nature is, however, to share, to give, and that creation reveals God meant His universe to be a joyful one. A. W. Tozer, again, points out that those who have come to love God for Himself will encounter countless blessings in relationship to Him. But we must remember that each gift is a bonus and because it was not sought for itself it may be enjoyed without injury to our relationship with God. But we must make no mistake, God will not stand for being one treasure among many, or even the chief treasure. People often like to say "God is number one in my life," or "Jesus first." But God doesn't want to be number one, or first, HE wants to be EVERYTHING ! Jesus declares, "If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

The means or the end: what is God for you? Humanity has made the search for happiness the be all and end all of life, and it has brought untold tragedy and sorrow to the race. Again as Tozer says, the effort to achieve these things as the ulterior motive in back of accepting Christ may be something new, but new or old, it can only bring judgement upon those who teach it and those who believe it. The humanism of our day declares that man is his own end and his own greatest good. But scripture asserts God is to be our end, for Himself alone, because of who He is and because, in Christ, He bought us with a price at great cost to Himself. As the motto of the Moravian missionary cause asserts, "May the Lamb who was slain receive the reward of His suffering."