

Sunday School Lesson

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we can ourselves. The call of God is a call to battle, not a summons to hide.

For some persons God is confined to the church. I heard a theologian suggest that many of us by our attitude may be agreeing with those who have claimed that God is dead. When we feel we must enter a particular building to be near God, we may be saying that God is dead and the church is his tomb.

This idea is food for thought. Solomon, in his prayer of dedication for the Temple, declared: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27)

Does Our Idea of God Really Matter?

Our idea of God is important because it has a great deal to do with the way we live our lives.

If we see God as little more than conscience, we will be inclined to do that which makes us feel good inside and avoid that which makes us feel bad or uneasy. Of course, we should enjoy serving God and receive satisfaction from that service; but if we think of God just as conscience, we can often convince ourselves that what we want to do is right. We can maintain that sincerity is enough. But the sincerity with which we may hold a particular belief is no guarantee of its truth.

On the other hand, if we see God as the creator and sustainer of the universe actively ruling the world he has made, we will live very differently. Our lives will become less self-centered, and we shall see ourselves in a relationship with God.

If we put too much emphasis on God's transcendence or "otherness," we may think of him as so far removed from us that he takes little notice of our condition and needs. Consequently, we may feel that we must work out our destiny with little reference to God, assigning to him a very minor role in our lives.

However, another danger is introduced when we lay so much stress on God's immanence or "presentness" that we see him only as an enlarged reflection of ourselves. We may come to feel so intimate with God that we think of him as a crony or pleasant companion whom we know thoroughly.

If we lose sight of the otherness of God, we lose the sense of his majesty. On the other hand, if we forget that he is always near — immanent — we tend to think of him as unrelated to life as we experience it. We must struggle to hold both views together, for one without the other presents a distorted picture of God, and this distortion leads to distortions in our lives.

Only as we have a true understanding of God can we live in a manner he can approve.

Thinking Theologically

Thinking theologically may seem difficult, but it simply means to take God into account in our lives — to reckon seriously with the fact that God is presently involved in his world.

Many of us go about our own business, pursuing our selfish concerns (as individuals and as nations), acting as though we were quite alone and free to do as we please. Can it be that our failure to think theologically has brought us to these present difficult days? Can it be that the only way out of our present dilemma is for us to find our way back to God and to take seriously the fact that all of life comes from and through him and that he is therefore concerned with everything that happens in this world?

We must honestly face the fact that for many of us God plays little or no part in our scheme of things. True, we believe in the church and support it. But have we been willing to let what we have heard and accepted on Sunday radically affect the way we live the other six days of the week? Does not much of our devotion amount to little more than lip service? Do our actions conform to what is being said by the church? To put it bluntly, Do we practice what we preach?

If we cannot give the right answers to these questions, we are not thinking theologically.

Acting Theologically

Important as thinking theologically is, it will amount to nothing if we do not act theologically. We have the freedom to respond to God either in disobedience or in obedience. We may choose good or evil. But only if we choose to follow God's will for our lives, will we find the happiness we long for.

We need to recognize (1) that this is God's world and (2) that

we must live in it in accordance with his will or we will not live at all.

All of life is a dealing with God. He is inescapable. That is what the psalmist who wrote Psalms 139 said so beautifully. For example, read verses 9-10.

The psalmist knew that God was in his world and was actively engaged in working for his good and the good of all men. Thus the psalmist was thinking and acting theologically.

We do not like to talk about the fact of God's judgment, but this refusal does not remove its reality from our lives. God always comes in judgment, whether we like it or not. The world in which we live today manifests this judgment.

Our wars are the judgment of God upon our failure to hear the word of Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers." Hunger stalks the earth and children starve because we seek to hoard God's bounty and keep it for ourselves.

In the poem used at the beginning of the lesson God is pictured as being sad, and he must be sad when he contemplates our earth. It shows him as a little weary of putting up with us. It shows him prepared also to act in judgment, to smite the earth.

But then the little man stands up to say: "You must not strike it, God; I'm in the way." And God replies: "Dear child, I feared that you were dead," and so he "stayed His hand."

Over and over again the Bible and the church tell us that it is not our merit but God's mercy that prevents our total destruction. We are, according to some persons, headed for oblivion; but it need not be so. God will stay his hand if we rise from the deadness of our living and take God seriously and try to fulfill his will and purpose in our lives. We must live theologically.

What Can We Do About It?

We are living in a day that calls for action. But action without careful planning and clear recognition of the problem does not help.

During this quarter's lessons we will be learning what the Bible teaches about God. Move than this, we will be seeking to understand how we may apply these insights to our living. We are confronted today by problems large enough to stagger the strongest mind. We need to cultivate an awareness of God in

our individual lives and then strive to become aware of his activity in the world about us.

In every crisis situation we shall endeavor to discover God's will in that particular situation. This task will not always be easy, but we must make the effort. Once we have determined what that will is, then we must at whatever cost prepare our-

selves to carry out that will.

We will not always agree completely as to what precisely is God's will, and each of us will have to walk by the light he has and do what he feels is God's will for him. But, above all, we must seek to open up our lives that God may reveal to us his will and purpose.

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