

~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:

The book of Romans sheds great light on current conditions. The first chapter is most relevant in comprehending present-day atrocities.

Humanizing God

In the beginning God made man in His image, and ever since the Fall, sinful man has tried to remake God into his image rather than being conformed to the image of Christ. This is the underlying problem in Romans chapter one. When they "knew God" they refused to "glorify God as God." Their downward spiral accelerated as "they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made like to corruptible man." Here it is in black and white – men who want to bring God down to the human level. This is the terrible sin of humanizing God.

Behind this fiendish ploy is the "god of this world" who attempted to dethrone God. Satan tried to displace God as the center of the universe. Of course, we know he failed in his initial attempt to dislodge God as universal Sovereign. Later in the wilderness temptation, Satan attempted to overtake the ruling throne as he spoke to Christ, "All these things will I give you if you will fall down and worship me" (Mt. 4:9).

A conspiracy is still underway. Satan's attempts to dethrone God have not ceased. Now fallen man has teamed up with the Enemy Satan in a joint effort to get God off the throne. The major strategy in this ill-fated attempt is to create lies to replace the truth. One example is evolution, nothing more than a way to get rid of God, or at least get Him down to where we can handle Him! Evolution removes God from the picture totally, while theistic evolution removes Him from being a major player. Either is an attempt to dethrone God.

The attack on the Bible is but another attempt to dethrone God. We have all heard the basic argument that the Bible is not totally reliable, and therefore we have no ultimate authority. This theory surmises that God is not perfect, if He exists at all. Denying Christ's miraculous birth and His miracles is a form of humanizing God.

Another way to humanize God is to strip Him of His unappealing attributes. Today's preaching in many cases cautiously avoids those aspects of God's perfect character which bring guilt to imperfect people. In so doing, "God" is reduced to a passive, non-threatening deity.

We have heard scores of sermons on the Second Coming. Many sermons have been preached on the second birth. But when was the last time you heard a message on the second death? The whole notion of God as a judge who casts lost people into eternal darkness is seldom heard. In fact, popular preaching is more therapeutic than prophetic. I wonder if when average people hear the word "God" they have mental images of a giant smiling face?

Humans are forbidden to trifle with God's glory. When the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant they thought they had Israel's God in a box. So they set the Ark beside their god Dagon. Early on the second day Dagon was found fallen over, broken in pieces. Horrible plagues came upon the Philistines. They had had enough of Israel's God, so they sent the Ark back. Upon receiving it, the Israelites peeked in the Ark and 50,000 were slain (1 Sam., chapters 5 and 6).

When God's glory is present, disruptions and the unexpected are likely to occur. Paul warned the Corinthians of the harsh consequences – even death – that follow when we come to the Lord's table in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:27-32). Do most today actually want God's glory – and His righteous demands and the discomfort it is likely to cause?

Jesus said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28).

Eliminating the fear of God is but another way to make God more tolerable. How many church members have been taught to have no fear of God? When Paul preached to Felix, he did not open his witness with, "God has a wonderful plan for your life!" He reasoned with him of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. And the Bible says that Felix trembled. When we eliminate the fear of God and mask the sterner aspects of truth, conviction of sin becomes a very rare commodity.

Man also attempts to bring God down to the human level by not believing God means what He says, which is

literally calling God a liar. For example, God said He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). But because some don't believe God means what He says, many don't bother to seek Him. Only one step further is bold disobedience and flagrant rebellion. How many disregard the command, "Be ye not unequally yoked" (2 Cor. 6:14), and go ahead and marry an unsaved person? They don't believe God meant it when He said people reap what they sow (Gal. 6:7). They really don't believe that every one of us will stand at the judgment seat and give account of our deeds both good and evil (Rom. 14:12). "Honor thy father and mother...that thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:2-3). How many children think God is telling us a fable? They really don't believe their lives will be cut off prematurely. They literally believe God is lying.

Numbers 23:19 states, "God is not a man, that he should lie." Psalm 50 clearly shows how rampant sin results when wicked men humanize God. They speak deceitfully, slander, steal, and commit adultery, all because in their hearts they think they can get away with it. But God sets them straight: "These things hast thou done and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee" (Ps. 50:21).

Deifying Man

Humanizing God naturally paves the way toward the second sin of deifying man. After exchanging the glory of God for the image of man, the object of worship is no longer God, but man himself. Romans 1:25 states, "Who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator." Fallen man (by nature an enemy of God) seeks to bring God down to the human level and exalt man to God's level.

Self-exaltation is not new. It is as old as the devil. Our entire culture is permeated with the belief in the godhood of man. "I am captain of my fate. I am the master of my soul." The message is clear: do anything and everything to please yourself. Restrictions don't apply when you're a god in quest of self-fulfillment.

Man's arrogance and fateful pride is capsuled in the Humanist Manifesto. Notice this excerpt: "We can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species...No deity will save us; we must save ourselves...Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful." The Humanist Manifesto II goes even further: "The next century can and should be the humanist century. Using technology wisely, we can control our environment, conquer poverty, markedly reduce disease, extend our life span, significantly modify our behavior, alter the course of human evolution and cultural development, unlock vast new powers, and provide humankind with unparalleled opportunity for achieving an abundant and meaningful life." What is this other than an attempt to deify man?

Unhappily, this trash is not limited to atheists and self-acclaimed liberals. Alas, this terrible sin is fast becoming an established article of faith among professing Christians. The ultimate evil is no longer sin but a lack of success or happiness. One media evangelist believes we are "little gods" on our way to sovereignty! A leading pastor of the Selfist movement believes the worst thing you could ever do is tell a man he is a sinner. Self-worship will not allow for true guilt before our Holy God. The self-esteem cult would do away with the need for repentance and humility.

What tremendous pride! Pride is not just thinking we are better than others; it is thinking we are better than we are. The truth is we are not good people who happen to do some bad things; we are sinners through and through! But a society that deifies man doesn't believe this.

The deification of man is clearly seen in some groups where spiritual heroes are elevated to an unhealthy plane. Let one of these "giants" fall and watch the cynicism and fallout among the followers. The reason so many are wiped out is that they were worshiping the man, not God. One of the Reformers said, "If the worship of God is not central in church services, the church will become a personality cult." This is certainly worthy of serious consideration in our day of "big man" theology.

Nebuchadnezzar was guilty of this dreaded sin. "The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30). But God abased this man and sent him to eat grass with the cattle of the field (Dan. 5:20-21). Nebuchadnezzar is not alone. He is now joined by an innumerable host of senseless fools grazing on barren pastures of falsehood while utterly deceiving themselves. All man's attempts to exalt himself will ultimately fail, for "a man's pride shall bring him low" (Prov. 29:23).

Minimizing Sin

Because the vision of God has faded, sin does not appear exceedingly sinful. With a low view of God sin is not really black, merely a pale gray. Of course, the normalization of sin follows a weakened image of God. Note carefully the words of Romans 1:29-32:

"Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affections, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

Having brought God down and propped man up, it is only natural to trivialize sin. But how is sin minimized? "Well, nobody is perfect." What better way to minimize sin than by rationalizing? With wisecracks and jokes about sin abounding in some pulpits, people are reassured that sin is normal and to be accepted. Shortcomings, failures, mistakes, temperament weaknesses, and other catch words serve to blunt the severity of sin. "Mid-life crisis" is the new name for adultery. "Sibling rivalry" sounds better than selfishness and jealousy...One lady requested prayer that she might get victory over her "little sins." I wonder how little those sins were when Jesus bore their judgment on Calvary?

Another technique for minimizing sin is by underestimating the blackness of the human heart. That mighty prophet, A. W. Tozer, stated publicly that he had seen a lot of terrible things in his long life of sixty-three years, but the most wicked thing that he ever saw was his own heart! Jesus said man's problem was within - "for from within, out of the heart of man proceed..." (Mk. 7:21). The problem is not what a man does; the problem is what he is, a sinner. Oswald Chambers said, "Sin is not primarily wrong doing; it's wrong being."

Another way of minimizing sin is by downplaying sin's consequences. W.C. Fields, famous comedian of the last century, was found one day by a close associate poring over the Scriptures. Taken back by the intensity of his huckster friend, he asked Fields what he was doing reading the Bible. Fields responded, "Looking for loopholes."

Sin and its consequences are not taken seriously when men lower their view of God and enshrine themselves. Responsibility and accountability are not emphasized in a man-centered theology. The whole concept of "God our judge" is dismissed and replaced with "God our servant." Jesus becomes a type of bellboy or Santa Claus who is loaded with goodies. The benefits of Christianity are repeatedly emphasized with little reference to the judgment seat. Obedience, holiness, fruitbearing, hot-heartedness, and spiritual reality become optional or secondary instead of primary.

Downplaying sin's consequences brings the Church to the spiritual temperature of lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, and to the threat of being spewed from God's mouth! Comfortable truth alone will put the Church in a spiritual stupor from which there may be no recovery once God disengages Himself. Laodicea was totally unaware of its sorry state. It has been said that "Truly it is an evil to be full of faults, but it is a still greater evil to be full of faults and to be unwilling to recognize them."

The terrible truth is that the three-fold sin of society is not limited to the lost. In times of declension it filters through into the Redeemed! There is little doubt in my mind that this three-pronged sin is at the root of the wholesale decline of our culture. The problem is not a strong humanism but a weak evangelicalism! All our ills can ultimately be traced to a subnormal concept of God.

Preachers must communicate the biblical vision of God to a guilty generation. This will only be possible if the Bible is opened on bended knee, so intimate knowledge of the Holy can be integrated into the prophet's soul. Multitudes are slipping blindly into eternal damnation while the Church sleeps.

It's time to rouse ourselves and gaze into eternity to see the high and lofty One. Of course, it will be shocking. It will be dreadful. But sooner or later this sin must be judged. If not dealt with here, it will be dealt with there. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).