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304 - For The Love Of God

1. Introduction

For many the Bible represents a rigid rule book that takes the fun out of life. Others turn away from service to God because they feel they're too damaged and beyond redemption. Still others reject the idea of God, sin, righteousness and eternal reward or punishment. In this lesson we'll discuss the influences that have led to these and other attitudes and why we need to serve the him **For The Love Of God** that's been shown to us.

2. A transformed reality

We've seen dystopian scenarios in movies of a world that's been altered and the population is unaware of the reality of life. Such a synthetic world seems to be a work of fiction but in the spiritual realm that's essentially what we're dealing with. God created the world in perfection, provided meaning, purpose and enjoyment of life which could have continued indefinitely. Satan, the real enemy of humanity, entered the picture, and through deception tricked the first couple into making the worst possible choice they could have made. Thousands of years later humanity seeks answers to the meaning of life in science, the paranormal, alien encounters and more. We want to know why we're here, what our purpose is and how to live a fulfilling life unaware that the answers to our questions have been provided in the pages of the inspired word; the Bible.

In this lesson we'll discuss

- a. The reality of the beginning
- b. The confusing cloud of history
- c. Unification of Diversity
- d. The Thread That Binds
- e. The Love Of God
- f. The Legacy Of (Un)belief

Let's take a look at each of these

3. The reality of the beginning

Most people today have been influenced with the idea that the universe spontaneously came into existence when a sudden spark ignited the process of creation. The Big Bang, as it's known, is thought to remain detectable in the dim reaches of space or as subtle background noise and radiation. The James Webb telescope recently revealed images of far distant stars that challenge astronomers. Over thirty years ago - the Hubble telescope did the same thing. Objects were revealed that had never been seen before and new interpretations of the cosmos were put forward to explain new findings such as the elliptical distribution of galaxies along a central plane. Fascinating stuff no doubt. From a human perspective it creates awe, wonder and terror at

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the same moment. But from a practical point of view there are some basic unanswered questions.

In what space did the universe exist prior to the Big Bang? What served as the catalyst to cause the Big Bang. How did individual cells exercise volition to undertake evolutionary modifications that didn't just help them adapt, but literally leave their native environments for something completely different. Were these cells sentient in their own right and if so why has the process apparently stalled. If forms changed from one species to another where are the transitional forms and why can't we detect intermediate processes with more clarity? What is life? How did it come about? Why did humans develop the idea of a creator, a soul or an afterlife. Are we genuinely so scared of our own mortality that we can't imagine or tolerate the idea that we'll come to an end?

Theories abound that offer explanations for the ultimate origins of the universe and are regarded as true. Data is collected and modeled to fit these theories and sometimes theories are adjusted, abandoned or completely revised to fit new data. The idea of evolution and the development of the universe is soundly based on the idea that everything that is has come about as part of a natural process. Vast periods of time have been needed for the Earth and cosmos to reach the state it's in. The idea of an omnipotent being having the power to speak things into existence is regarded simply as myth or superstition.

The problem with this is that evolutionary theories can't account for many things. Gaps in the evolutionary tree are baffling. The laws of physics contradict the suppositions of evolutionary science but in spite of that, scientists are sure there's no God. If we suspend our disbelief for a moment and consider the possibility that God not only exists, but that he created the universe and revealed himself to us, how much more could we learn about the universe around us? And why is that so hard to imagine?

One of the things I've proposed over the years is that rejection of God in our time is based on two influences. The first of these is the nature of humans. From the beginning mankind rejected God's directives and drove a wedge between ourselves and the creator. As I'll demonstrate in this lesson going forward, God has continually reached out in love to let us know he's there and that he wants to save us. The second great influence over the years in my opinion has been the behavior of those claiming to follow God and represent him. In the Western Hemisphere the "church" exercised totalitarian control over the minds of the population. The church persecuted and killed those who opposed officially sanctioned doctrine, controlled the flow of information on everything including the scriptures and learning in general, and exercised a level of social oppression that few other powers have ever wielded.

In addition to these accomplishments, wars were fought, millions exterminated, and nations taxed into oblivion to support the holy cause. Every aspect of life was controlled, determined by and authorized by the church. Until people had enough and began to rebel. Even as enlightenment began factions within the church rose up, fought each other, practiced their own

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form of repression and furthered the cause of superstition and ignorance for hundreds of years. All in the name of God. Atheism, atheistic humanism and other disciplines rose, gained the upper hand and began to work on expelling the influence of those Bible believers setting the stage for culture wars that continue today. And we can understand that.

None of that has anything to do with God, the Bible or the reality of life. God created humans and placed them in a garden paradise where they had an idyllic existence. Their decision to defy God and sin brought about the separation of humanity from the Lord and introduced physical death into the family of man. Over time humans drifted from God, they forgot, they created their own versions of creation and the creator. Slowly the story was forgotten in the majority of the population. And that leads us to taking a careful look at the cloud of history and how events obscure fact. The end result is that we live in an artificial reality that was never intended by God and while we may doubt the story of the scriptures and their instruction, the fact remains that we live in a synthetic world.

4. The confusing cloud of history

The passage of time has a tendency to cloud our understanding of historical events. We can come to conclusions about certain aspects of what's taken place but our knowledge of such things is incomplete at best. The exception is when we have writings that specifically record decisions made, discussions that took place or experiences of those who lived through the event under question. While we have some records that we can rely on the accounts dim and lose detail as we recede farther into the past. One of the problems we run into when trying to understand the history of the world is the apparent lack of connection between cultures. On the surface that is. As we look at the development of the world and cultures that shaped our existence today we may find it difficult to see the underlying similarities. We typically divide the world into cultures such as the Indo-Europeans, Afro-Asiatic and others based on their languages and cultural evolution.

Language is one way we can see similarities in development of various cultures but religious ideas and practices shed light on this as well. In different parts of the world we see consistent ideas and practices emerging, becoming prominent and then fading as they're replaced by other ideas. Many times those changes are brought about by the destruction or assimilation of cultures. Contrasting Eastern and Western spirituality we find some who have concluded that spiritual ideas and practices demonstrate a developmental aspect of culture. Primitive ideas are replaced by more complex, sophisticated and intellectual ideas that are seen as precursors to religious ideas today. Turning to the Bible what we find is a thread that helps us understand similarities between cultures, recurring themes in their spiritual practice and ultimately links that unite all of humanity in the midst of diversity.

5. Unification of Diversity

To cut through the confusion we'll go back to the Bible where we'll begin examining the

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development of humanity. In the beginning there were two people who gave birth to everyone that follows. Genesis chapters one through three records the creation of Adam and Eve, their placement in the garden of Eden, the sin that created their separation from God and how they were driven from the garden. Chapter four records the spiritual rivalry between Cain and Abel and the resulting murder of Abel. From that point on we're given a glimpse of the rapid growth of humans and how they lived.

Genesis chapter five details the descendants of Adam. Genesis chapter six describes the social conditions that had developed. We have to remember that all these people were direct descendants of two people who had been in the presence of God in the beginning. Over time the laws God put in place were ignored. Marriage wasn't respected and men took wives of all that they saw (**Gen 6.2**). Violence filled the Earth as well and may have been partly a result of the disrespect toward God's law of marriage. As the story develops God decides to destroy all flesh with the exception of Noah who found grace in God's sight as a man of faith (**Gen 6.7-8**).

Following the flood God once again provides instruction on how to live and what to do. Shortly afterward we read of the plot of humans to build a tower that can reach heaven so they can make a name for themselves (**Gen 11.4**). God intervenes and confuses the language of mankind causing the various groups to spread out and cover the Earth as the Lord intended (**Gen 11.7-9**). The diversity of language leads to differences in culture. Geographical displacement causes more differences to emerge that over time conceals the common origin of the groups.

In time the cultures that develop forget God, they didn't want to listen to him to begin with, and so distort the knowledge of the creator that was once handed down to them by those who knew God. In spite of the distortion and clouding of collective memory there are elements that are preserved throughout the world. Considered to be variations of mythic expression the common elements that exist in nearly all ancient cultures point back to a common point of origin. Almost every civilization in the ancient world has a story of creation, the idea of a deity that will punish for wrongdoing. Cultures have preserved the idea of a flood that was sent on the world and in many traditions there is a belief in an afterlife, a soul and a world we can go to when we die.

Where did these ideas come from? Some suggest that this is an attempt on the part of humans to explain life and existence. There are some who believe fear is a motivation for creating such stories and others believe that humans have an innate dread of mortality and for that reason created the idea of gods, deity, the concept of a soul and later a single omnipotent force. It's even been suggested by some such as Julian Jaynes that the development of these ideas represents the evolution of human intellect in sophistication and complexity as the primitive mind of humans grew, embraced the abstract and no longer needed a heavenly being as a crutch to face existence.

But what if those ideas aren't accurate. What if the stories recorded in the Bible are true.

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In that case we have the means of understanding and linking all cultures of the world. We can see the development of human thought as it moves away from God - a reality that's detailed in the scriptures. As we think about this we find that the stories, or myths in the world, have a foundation in truth but have been altered by rejection of God and the distortion of human intellect and misinterpretation. In spite of these realizations there's a single factor found in the scriptures that brings all these cultures together, explains the deviations and guides us back to the truth of the world.

6. The Thread That Binds

The Bible is clear on how humans rejected, turned away from God and even challenged the Lord. Paul provides an excellent synopsis of this. Speaking of the ancient world the apostle writes, *“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.”* (Rom 1.21-25).

As the flood ends and the family of Noah is able to leave the Ark, God records a simple appraisal of the state of mankind. *“And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.”* (Gen 8.20-22).

Although humans are capable of higher order intellectual pursuits and development, the tendency of mankind is to focus on the organic. We understand things in light of what we experience in a tactile sense. Our personal emotional attributes dictate what we'll accept or reject. When it comes to spiritual things we tend to interpret and view things as extensions of the physical. That was evident in Egypt as Pharaoh's and others were buried with their material possessions in preparation for the afterlife which would embody the pleasures and comforts of the physical world. Spirituality, even in regard to individuals who took a more nonmaterial esoteric approach, still reflects the body experience, emotional states or in some cases the manipulation and alteration of consciousness.

All of these practices, philosophies and ascetic approaches, lead scholars and others to conclude that the search for spirituality and meaning in life, isn't a reflection of a soul or realm

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beyond ours, but is a phenomenon unique to humans representing an inner struggle to make sense out of existence. There's a certain degree of fatalism born of scientific interpretations that reduces life to our organic and psychological development marked by the passage of developmental milestones ending with our death. To some there's nothing more to life than that and one should make peace with themselves and the world while waiting for our expiration date to arrive.

The Bible isn't just a band-aid to make us feel better and lure us into a false hope. There's a practical side to it that reminds us that once upon a time in the beginning we knew who God was, but it was the decision of humans to violate the relationship with the Lord for which we were separated from our creator. And that's where we need to focus on the love that God has for his creation and his desire to preserve and save - not destroy. If not for the love of God none of us would be here and the story of the Bible is one of love, patience, engineering and integrity.

7. The Love Of God

An omnipotent being with the power to speak the physical universe into existence has the power to create beings that will do nothing but obey his will. But is that the hallmark of a benevolent creator? Of course not. We're all familiar with governments that control and suppress individuality. Personal freedom in many nations only extend as far and as long as those in power allow it. When a population gives in to the will of a tyrant there's nothing to be said about choice, individuality or freedom. There is none.

In the beginning God created humans in a sinless state. Provided for their every need and issued only one prohibition. Critics of the Bible think that the story of Adam and Eve is a setup for failure. Because of that the story is regarded as mythological in nature or a distorted tradition at best. But is that accurate?

Given purpose, security, food, pleasure and a relationship with the Lord in a paradise, who could want more. What more is there. When God told the couple they weren't to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was that too much to ask? Was it a temptation created to lure them into disobedience? Let's look at things a bit deeper.

If one is given freedom and the ability to choose, there has to be something to choose. In ancient philosophical and spiritual disciplines there's recognition of a balance between right, wrong, good and evil. If there are no opposing values then there's no choice. The fact that a choice exists means one thing, and one thing only. Adam and Eve had the ability to exercise their freedom and make a decision, even if that decision was wrong.

In the absence of having a choice then one could argue that they were simply being controlled by God and so really didn't have freedom. On the other side of that is the fact that had God not provided them with the ability to exercise their freedom and choose how to act, what

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kind of creator would he be? This is a somewhat hard concept to grasp but the fact is that when one doesn't have a choice to make, because there's nothing to consider as a choice, then one does not have the ability to exercise their freedom and make decisions about their lives. The fact they made the wrong choice however brings us to one of the most powerful doctrinal elements in the Bible and that is the thread of love God demonstrates toward humans from the beginning of time to the end of Revelation. Let's take a look at how that manifests and what it means for us.

When Adam and Eve sinned against God (**Gen 3**) he could have destroyed them. He stated that in the day they ate of the forbidden fruit they would die. When God confronted the couple he pronounced that their lives would change, physical death would be a reality. But, although he had the right as creator to destroy them, he didn't. He added that there would be a time when humans would be saved from the deception of the Devil, who had appeared in the form of a serpent (**Gen 3.15**). Love was expressed in their preservation and the promise of salvation to come.

As the family grew and sin multiplied in the world (**Gen 6**), God once more had every right, by virtue of being the creator, of destroying everyone. We find that the world had reached a state that most weren't going to listen and so they would lose their lives. Noah however, a man who walked with God, was told to prepare for the coming judgment so that he and his family would be saved (**Gen 6.13-21**). Love for his creation led God to preserve it. He had made a promise to Adam and Eve that one day all of mankind would be saved as the seed of woman bruised the head of the serpent, and that day hadn't come. God judged the world, demonstrated his love for all in preserving Noah, and created in the flood a powerful image of salvation as we discussed in the lesson on the figure of water. Love, wisdom and engineering combine in a story that later unfolds as part of the New Testament in such a way that no myth has ever done.

After the flood the population increased once more and they decided to defy God and make a name for themselves (**Gen 11**). The entire group was united in their rejection of God's command. God could have destroyed them for their rebellion but he didn't. Instead he confused their language (**Gen 11.1-9**) spreading them throughout the world as he had commanded. God emerges again as a being who exercises restraint and patience and acts in a way that doesn't destroy.

The promise God made to Adam and Eve, which we learn later was made before the world was created (**Titus 1.2**), becomes the focus of the narrative. God calls Abraham (**Gen 12**) to go to a place he would show him and makes three promises. The first is that the patriarch would have a son. The second was that his seed would become a great nation and inherit the land the Lord would show him. The third was that all families of the Earth would be blessed through him (**Gen 12.1-3**). This was a prophecy of the Messiah who would come into the world and reveal God's final revelation while taking the sins of the faithful away who lived prior to that time. Love is the message in all of this that restates the thread weaving through the biblical narrative.

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Abraham was told his seed would be in bondage in a strange land but return to the area promised in the fourth generation (**Gen 15.13-21**). Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt on the four hundred and thirtieth anniversary of their enslavement (**Ex 12.40-41**). Over a period of forty years, Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt and guided them while they wandered in the desert due to their lack of faith. In his farewell address to the people he states that God would raise up another prophet like him from among their brethren who they were to listen to or be cut off from a relationship with God (**Deut 18.18-19**). The complaints of the Hebrews, rebellion at times against Moses leadership and their fluctuating faith, angered the Lord at times but he cared for them and preserved them. Moses reminded them *“Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.”* (**Deut 8.4**). They had been fed by God and given water. They prevailed against their enemies and finally came to the border of the promised land. In all of these events the love and providence of God manifested repeatedly in ways that were undeniable. In spite of their lack of faith at times and complaints, God preserved and cared for them at all times demonstrating the love he had for them and the commitment he had to his promises to save all of mankind through them.

The nation of Israel, and later the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah, sinned against God until such time as there was no remedy (**2 Chron 36.16**). God had foretold the consequences to come upon them if they became evil as the nations who lived in the land before them had. In the midst of those prophecies was the promise of restoration, the preservation of a remnant and the coming of the Messiah. Even after returning from seventy years of exile in Babylon, attitudes continued to stray from God which were met with rebuke by the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. God continued to preserve them in spite of the turmoil in the world around them until such time as Christ came into the world. Once more we see love, patience, faithfulness and commitment on the part of God toward not only the seed of Abraham but to all humanity whose spiritual welfare was critical.

Jesus came into the world at a time when conditions were perfect to accomplish God’s plan. Paul refers to this as the fulness of time (**Gal 4.4**). The world around Palestine was at peace for the most part. The Romans stabilized the nations and surrounding countries and the Greek language served as a common medium of communication. As Christ preached the Gospel and began to deliver the message God gave him, the religious leadership conspired to have him killed as he confronted them with the reality of what they were. Prior to his death Christ spoke of the destruction to come on the nation for their actions (**Matt 24**) and noted that if God hadn’t shortened those days, no one would survive (**Matt 24.21-22**). In AD 70 Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army. In spite of the destruction Christ’s warning, if heeded by those who listened to him, saved lives. God continued to demonstrate his love toward the rebellious nation and restrained the destroyers from complete genocide. Once more love emerges, was preached in spite of persecution, and manifested in God’s blessing of the completion of the revelation of his word which we now have in the world today.

God’s love for us continues to manifest in the preservation of the scriptures. While there

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are numerous translations of the text and some have attempted to alter the scriptures, there are reliable volumes that exist to let us know who God is, who we are and what we need to do. It's the love of God that has preserved those things, revealed that someday the end will come, or we'll die first, and after that we'll be judged (**Heb 9.27**). The love of God is summed up by Paul when he states, "***But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.***" (**Rom 5.8**). God has shown love for all of mankind in spite of a history of rejection and rebellion that began with the first humans. Because God has loved us first and he doesn't desire to destroy anyone (**Ezek 18.23, 33.11**), we need to open our minds and hearts to his word and consider it seriously.

So, if God loved us, has endured the rejection of mankind and continues to bless everyone, why is it that so many refuse to consider the Lord and turn away from him. The answer to that question has two parts as I mentioned earlier.

8. The Legacy Of (Un)belief

The two main reasons that explain why people turn away from God are really simple. Both of them have much to do with the nature of humans and our personal development as well as the history that I noted earlier that has clouded our collective memory.

First is the inherent trait of humans to not want to be told what to do. Eve was somewhat innocent and naive in being misled by Satan to sin against God, but the reality was that in the end she put her own desires and intentions ahead of God. Adam did the same thing. That never changes in the spiritual history of the human race recorded in the Bible. God observed that "***the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth...***" (**Gen 8.21**) which provides the reason for everything that was done in opposition to the Lord in the scriptural record. As humans we want to be the boss. We want what we want and we don't anyone telling us what we should or shouldn't do. That's a very simplistic way to sum up how we think. John identifies the attributes of spiritual rejection as he defines temptation as the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (**1 John 2.16**). If we analyze our own actions as well as the sins recorded in the Bible we'll see that these elements are at work in every case.

The second reason for rejecting God I believe lies in the actions of those who claim to represent God. Christian bodies over the centuries have persecuted, suppressed and killed others in the name of God. Those who differ from the leadership of certain bodies have been labeled as heretics who were tortured, excommunicated, executed and otherwise persecuted. This hypocrisy has had the effect of causing many to question and reject the ideas offered by "Christianity" not necessarily due to the nature of the scriptures but because of the actions, false ideas, misleading hope and even corruption that has tarnished the idea of God. I've often reminded people that we shouldn't judge God based on what those who claim to be his children do, but on the merit of the word and the blessings that do exist. With the confusion that exists in the Bible believing world, the reputation and actions of religious leaders and the appeal of other world religions, many view

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the Bible as just another spiritual practice that may have some merit but is no more important than any of the others. Christ stated, “*Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18.8). Faith, as we’ve defined previously, begins with a knowledge of God’s word but has to be followed up with behavior that mirrors the word, reflects gratitude for the love God has shown us and desires to love the creator.

9. Summary

Why serve God? Let’s review what we’ve covered and shed some light on the problem.

- a. God created mankind, provided for every need and didn’t interfere with personal choice
- b. When sin entered the world, God imposed sanctions but didn’t destroy Adam & Eve
- c. God has imposed sanctions on sin over the years but only destroys when there is no alternative
- d. God promised deliverance and salvation in the beginning and remained faithful to his promise
- e. God sent his son into the world at a specific time to offer himself as the final sacrifice for sin for all time
- f. God has preserved his word so that all may have access to salvation
- g. The ideas and behavior of some claiming to represent God have led to rejection and unbelief
- h. The inherent nature of humans is to reject God in favor of personal ideas and convictions
- i. God has given and respected the right of all humans to accept or reject him and doesn’t force anyone to obey him against their will
- j. God has warned that there will be a judgment in which all will give an account for what we’ve done in this life and has provided his word and blessings so we can make a decision about whether we’ll follow that or not.
- k. Following God needs to be done out of appreciation for his love extended toward us and the blessings we have through him.

Many will continue to reject God and his word while many more will accept doctrines that deny the truth. The bottom line is that we all have the ability to choose what we’ll believe. We have the ability to find God in his word and understand the things that have been revealed. It’s not an impossible task but not one that will be embraced by the masses.

10. Next

So far in the discussion of the doctrine of the Bible we’ve stressed that the word is the foundation of faith which identifies and details the unique doctrine of the scriptures. We also discussed the fact that faith begins with knowledge but has to be demonstrated by our actions.

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We examined the all or nothing principle that stressed that we need to accept all of God's word, not just the parts we like or agree with. Then we discussed the love God has demonstrated toward all of humanity and why that's the reason we should want to serve him. In the next lesson we'll examine the Heart Of The Matter that shows our need to embrace faith and the love of God in our inner being.