



“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” JOHN 12:21

“We preach Christ crucified.” 1 CORINTHIANS 1:23

“Thy Word is Truth.” JOHN 17:17



Romans 11:33–36

³³Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are his judgments
and how untraceable his ways!

³⁴“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his adviser?”

³⁵“Or who has first given to God
that he will be repaid?”

³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

The One Thing You Should Know About God

The Triune God is an unminable source of riches, wisdom, knowledge, judgements, promises. You literally will never, this side of heaven, uncover everything there is to know about the Triune God. But that doesn't mean we don't know anything, and it doesn't mean that there aren't at least a few things which we absolutely have to know and agree on as Christians.

The first is this: There is a God and you are not Him. God is Triune, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This Triune God is Holy and Just. You and I are not. So you and I are not God. This is the most basic teaching of Christianity. Obvious right? Well, not really. If it were that obvious, the Apostle Paul wouldn't have needed to rhetorically ask,

³⁴ *“For who has known the mind of the Lord?*

Or who has become His counselor?”

³⁵ *“Or who has first given to Him*

And it shall be repaid to him?”

Of course it's absurd to think we could teach God anything, or that God needs anything from me, and if I give Him things, then I receive blessings. That's absurd. But we do this all the time. We think we deserve God's blessings because of who we are, or maybe more pointedly, of who we're not – we're not like everyone out there. And we try teaching God all the time. And the way we try teaching Him is by telling Him with our thoughts or actions that our ways are better than His ways. This happens whenever we break one of the ten most basic things that the Triune God has given us; the Ten Commandments.

Because to break a *single* commandment is to make an idol out of yourself and your own thoughts or actions, which is the 1st Commandment *“You shall have no other gods.”*

And so what God tells us through the Ten Commandments is another basic thing we need to know as Christians, because not only will it help us make sense of our current world, but also of who God is and who I am not. The Ten Commandments show us what our true nature really is like.

It's no secret that the 5th Commandment, "You shall not kill" was broken in a big public way a little over a week ago, with the murder of George Floyd. And of course, even if he hadn't been killed, it still would have been a sin, because as Jesus says hating is murder of heart. And this is where racism stems from. It's a sin against the 5th Commandment, but also against the 8th; because the 8th Commandment tells us to always "*excuse our neighbor, speak well of him and put the best construction on everything.*" Racism is to put the *worst* construction on everything; to believe that because our neighbor has a darker skin color, we are justified in thinking or speaking poorly of them, or not showing love to them as we ought.

In the case of George Floyd, while we don't know what was the actual motivation of the officers who killed him, the 5th commandment also says that it's also a sin even if you don't help and befriend your neighbor in his need. And this was obviously not done.

Now does the 5th Commandment mean that police officers should never use force or kill? No. Because the 4th commandment is above and before the 5th commandment. The 4th Commandment says we are to "*honor our father and mother [and all others in authority], so that we may live long on the earth.*" The 4th Commandment is where God gives authority to the government to protect our life. So one of the duties that God has given to our government is the power of the sword and authority to kill. This is why Christians can be soldiers and police officers and kill justly.

But this doesn't mean that this authority and power can't be abused. A pastor on Issues, etc. said it this way: Just because a parent has authority over their children, doesn't give them the right to abuse their children, but unfortunately, some still do. And here's the thing about authority: when someone sins by their authority, it does deep and lasting damage. If a child is hurt by a stranger, that's one thing, but if a child is abused by their parent, that's something that will hurt deeper and longer.¹

¹ Bryan Wolfmuller, "The Killing of George Floyd and the Ensuing Riots and Unrest." Podcast on Issues, ETC.
<https://issuesetc.org/2020/06/02/1532-the-killing-of-george-floyd-and-the-ensuing-riots-and-unrest-pr-bryan-wolfmuller-6-2-20/>

This is the hurt that many in our country feel right now. The hurt of when someone who is supposed to protect them, all too often does the opposite. It doesn't mean that every authority is bad, but it does mean that many feel especially hurt by the sins of the few.

And Christians have not always done a great job with empathizing with and standing with our brothers and sisters who are deeply hurting, because this is an opportunity for the Gospel and love of Christ to shine. And so for that, we should repent.

But now, it's also no secret that the deep hurt that many feel has been carried over into violent rioting and looting. Understand what's going on: The tendency of human beings when we are sinned against, or we feel hurt, especially by those who should love us, is to take justice into our own hands. But God says "*vengeance is mine*" less than a chapter later in Romans (Romans 12:18). So when we do this, when we take matters into our hands, we are not leaving room for God to *His* work of justice.

This is always our temptation when we are sinned against. When we are sinned against by a person, the devil hardens our conscience toward that person. Or when we are sinned against by an institution, the devil hardens our conscience toward that institution. And so when we lash out at people or institutions that may have hurt us and *may in fact be corrupt and sinful*, when we sin against them, it feels good. In fact it feels *righteous*. We feel like we are doing a good work when we sin against those who sin against us. And the whole thing starts a vicious cycle of sin on top of sin, building energy, and trapping more and more people in sin.

This is the danger for everybody: for the people protesting, for the people watching, for the people making judgements at home in front of their TV's. We can even do this while we sit at home on our computers. We can look around us at all the crises happening, and we can use them to self-justify our thoughts. Whether that be that conservatives are racist or that progressives are lawless, or whatever. If we use events like this to justify our own thoughts and our actions rather than mourning for those who are mourning, rather than going to God in prayer, rather than forgiving those who sin against us and repenting and loving our neighbor, rather than proclaiming the peace of God, we are simply falling into righteous indignation and self-justification, to make the case that whatever we do or believe is good and just.

And that self-justification is to put ourselves into God's place. This is idolatry. We are making ourselves into our own god. And so here we are back again at the first commandment. We are

not God. This is the very reason we require that confirmands memorize the Ten Commandments, because their primary purpose is to show us who we are not. We are not God.

Who We Are

So if we are not God, who are we? This was the lesson that Jesus had to teach Nicodemus in our Gospel lesson; Pharisee Nicodemus initially came to Jesus thinking he could justify himself. Jesus said to him, *“Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh.”* We’re not God, we’re a creation. But a creation, that since the fall into sin, has been born of sinful flesh. Every single person on earth can trace their lineage back to one man: Adam, who by his sin, caused sin and death to be passed down to each succeeding generation. So yes, this means that everyone on earth, no matter the color, is of the same family. But more significantly, it means that we’re all sinners; and we’re all on the same level. Sinners who cannot enter the kingdom of God by our own works.

But if we *could* enter the kingdom of God in this way, by self-justification, there would be no need for God; no need for Jesus to die on the cross, and certainly no need for the Holy Spirit to bring us faith. See, God cannot be full of riches, and His judgements cannot be unsearchable, and His ways untraceable, if all we had to do is look within to justify ourselves and better society.

The saying “I can’t breath” has become a rallying cry around the world. But that also describes our condition due to sin. And for the very reason that we can’t, is that God actually *breathes* His Spirit into us. That’s the word that Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit to Nicodemus. John uses the Greek word *πνεῦμα* but in Hebrew it’s *רוח*. It’s a word that means at the same time “wind,” “spirit,” and “breath.” And it’s the same breath that God the Holy Spirit breathed into Adam’s nostrils to give Adam the breath of life.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, to breath life into all the world. To create faith in our hearts so that the *world* for which Jesus died, would not perish but have everlasting life. And the way the Holy Spirit breathes this life into us is another basic thing: water and the word; Holy Baptism.

Holy Baptism tells what the Holy Trinity thinks of us. Holy Baptism is the act of the Triune God to give you a new name, a new family, a new identity, one not shaped by all your worthless and

sinful acts of self-justification, but one that's shaped by Christ's perfect love for all the world. Christ came into our world. Christ stepped into our mess, into our sin, into our death. God doesn't merely solve a problem; He condescends to inhabit and absorb the mess we've made.

Our hope, then, our justification, is not found in our mastery over evil, but God standing with us in our evil. Baptism is Jesus standing with us in our evil, but also taking us into Himself, who is Holy. And declaring us to be holy.

In Holy Baptism, God gives you His holy name, and gives you access to all the promises that come with the name of the Triune God. The Triune God is One. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and Jesus prays that we be one just as He is with the Father and Holy Spirit. Baptism is how God makes us one. Baptism is how God breaks down not just the sins of racism, but race itself. Baptism is our entrance into the Kingdom of God; a kingdom not ravaged by injustice, riots, or death, but a kingdom of perfect justice, peace, and life.

This is the promise God made to Ezekiel when He said,

"I myself will shepherd my flock. I myself will let them lie down... I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured. I will strengthen the weak. I will destroy the fat and the strong, and I will shepherd them with justice."

"Oh the depth of the riches and knowledge of God." Only a God who knows the deep hurt that His people feel is One who can heal it. God, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, truly knows the hurt that His people feel, because He descended into it in the person of Jesus.

So what should you know about God? You should know that God is One, yet Triune; that God is Holy and Just. And this holy and just God has justified you. He has declared you holy. He has baptized you into His name. He has made you one with Himself and with every other baptized Christian. He the source, Who created us all in His image; He is the means, the means by which we will be restored to that image, which He has already begun in Baptism; and He is the goal, our hope and rest and peace, both now and in eternity.

"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

Gloria Patri...