

How to Hang Out With the Living God

“Who are you to say that your religion is right and everybody else’s is wrong?”
Have you ever been asked that question?

Or maybe you haven’t been asked it. Maybe you’re the one asking it. Maybe you’re looking for God. You realize that something’s missing in your life and believe it’s spiritual so you’re trying to find the way to connect with God.

Then you hear someone say, “My religion is right and everybody else is wrong,” and you think, but how can that be? How can anyone say they’re right about God and everybody else is wrong?

The culture of the US today is increasingly pluralistic. We’ve gone from the idea of the founders that there should be religious freedom to what’s called religious pluralism.

Religious freedom says that all people are free to believe what they want. Religious pluralism says that all religions from atheism to Buddhism to Islam to Christianity are all equally valid.

There’s a big difference between those two ideas. Religious freedom means that a Mormon can host a television program and say that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is the one true faith.

It means that Dan Brown is free to write *the Da Vinci Code* and claim that Jesus had a child with Mary Magdalene, that the male dominated church repressed the truth of the sacred feminine, and that true worship is goddess worship.

Religious freedom means that Michael Newdow, who brought the suit to remove the words “under God” from the pledge of allegiance can preach his atheism.

Religious freedom doesn’t make any claim about the validity of a faith.

Religious pluralism is very different. Religious pluralism says all expressions of faith are equally valid. Religious pluralism says you can’t publicly say that one faith is right because that means you have to say the others are wrong.

I can remember when I was a teenager trying to formulate my belief system and someone gave me the blind men and the elephant analogy. You've probably heard it.

There are four blind men who discover an elephant. Since the men have never encountered an elephant, they grope around, trying to understand and describe this new phenomenon.

One grabs the trunk and concludes an elephant is like a snake. Another puts his hands around one of the elephant's legs and says, no it's like a tree.

The third guy finds the elephant's tail and announces that it's like a rope.

Then the fourth blind man feels the elephant's side and concludes that the other three were totally wrong, and elephant is like a wall.

So each in his blindness is describing the same thing: an elephant. Yet each describes the same thing in a radically different way.

That was presented to me as being an analogy of the different religions of the world -- they are describing the same thing (God) in radically different ways.

The obvious conclusion is, no individual religion has a corner on truth. They're all equally valid.

Here's the question: Is there any truth to the analogy.

There is in this sense: If God is infinite and we are finite, then it's reasonable to believe that none of us can fully capture His nature. But that's it.

There's some problems that we can't overlook.

First, there is a fact of the matter: the elephant. What the blind men are attempting to describe is in fact an elephant, not something else.

There are factual questions concerning God like "Does God exist?" Atheism is a religious view. Obviously the atheist and the theist can't both be right.

So not all opinions, whether they're about elephants or the nature of God, are equally true.

Second, all four blind men are wrong. It's an elephant and it's not a wall or a rope or a tree or a snake. Their opinions are not equally true. They're equally false.

Third, and most important, the elephant analogy doesn't take into account any kind of special revelation.

If a fifth guy who could see would walk up describe the elephant as an elephant, then the whole analogy changes.

Actually pluralism as our culture defines it is defeats itself when you think about it logically.

Here's a discussion between a Christian and an objector that took place on the radio the other day:

The caller said, "We shouldn't criticize other people's religions." The Christian said, "Then why are you criticizing mine?" He said, "It's wrong to say other religions are wrong." The Christian said, "Then why are you saying my religion is wrong?" He said, "You're encouraging hate by saying only your view is right and others are mistaken." The Christian said, "Then why are you spreading hate by publicly reprimanding me saying that only your view is right and mine is mistaken?"

This is where the bottom falls out of the whole idea of religious pluralism. The only way one can defend it is by violating their own principles of pluralism, which goes to show that this view just doesn't work.

People rant and rave about being judgmental--all the while giving their own judgments.

What we should be doing is asking critical questions like, "How do we assess the truth claims of religions?"

The fact of the matter is the Bible makes pointed claims that there is a God who has revealed Himself to the world and that there's one way to know that God. To ignore that way is to end up suffering eternal destruction in hell.

There's no pluralism in the Bible. That in itself doesn't prove the Bible is true, but it sure proves that the idea of religious pluralism is false

Open your Bibles to Exodus 34 this morning. Page 82.

The Bible isn't just a compilation of religious writings. It was written over a period of 1600 years by 40 different authors from all walks of life but it fits together into one volume that we bind together and call "The Bible."

The Bible is based on God's work in history with its ultimate fulfillment in the future. It's knowing the history that makes the present and the future make sense.

The first book in the Bible is Genesis which is the book of beginnings. Genesis tells us how things got started. It tells us how human beings were created and how we sinned against our Creator through disobedience.

Genesis explains how God chose a man named Abraham and promised to bless his descendants. His descendants are the Jewish people.

By the book of Exodus the Jews are slaves in Egypt. God then sends Moses to lead them out of Egypt. Eventually the Jews get to the Promised Land where in time one of them is born to a virgin named Mary.

Jesus fulfills hundreds of prophecies, proclaims that He is the Son of God, proves His claims through miracles, then goes to the cross to bear the sins of the world.

In Exodus 34 we're in between the deliverance from Egypt and the move into the land of Israel. The time is the 15th century BC.

Well over one million people have followed Moses through the desert of Sinai to the foot of Mt. Sinai. There on the Mountain God gave Moses the 10 commandments.

During the time he was on the mountain with God the people made a golden calf and worshipped it.

Moses came down, broke the tablets with the commandments engraven on them, God judged, and now Moses is ready to go back up again.

I. God is a God of Second Chances

Read vs 1-9

This is truly an astounding chapter. God gave His people every blessing imaginable.

He performed miracle after miracle and the first time they get into a situation they don't understand they make their own god and worship it.

Now God is giving them another chance. He calls Moses back up on the mountain and says bring 2 new stone tablets because I'm going to carve the commandments in them again.

Read 10

As we've seen repeatedly in the book of Exodus, God keeps His promises. Israel didn't deserve anything from God but His condemnation. Instead He promises to bless them even more.

When God makes us promises we can count on them. When there's times when life doesn't make sense to us our job is to remain faithful. No golden calves, no seeking out other gods, just continuing to trust God.

I. God is a God of Second Chances

II. God Is A Holy God Who Demands Exclusive Worship

Read vs 12-14

God told his people to go into the land and destroy the false places of worship that dotted the land of Canaan.

This is a sample of why the Bible is so politically incorrect. If religious tolerance means we can't say another religion is wrong, then it's obvious that the Bible is intolerant.

The Bible says there is one God who provided the sacrifice of His one and only Son, so that the one way to heaven and forgiveness could be opened.

There are no other gods but Jehovah and there's no other valid faith except the Biblical one.

That's the message of the Bible and the only way around it is intellectual dishonesty.

The Bible is a book that forces us to make a decision one way or another. There's no middle ground.

As a Christian who's committed to the authority of the Bible I have no problem with someone wanting to challenge my faith. I would expect a Jehovah's Witness who believes that Jesus was a created being and not God to say that I'm wrong when I say that Jesus was truly God.

I would expect a Muslim who believes that Jesus didn't really die on the cross to challenge me when I say He did.

If they said anything less they wouldn't be true to their sincerely held beliefs.

Religious truth claims must be challenged if we're to have any confidence whatsoever that they're true.

I believe the Bible can stand the test of honest evaluation. The fulfilled prophecy, the scientific accuracy, the historical accuracy of the Bible are all facts that you can check out.

You won't find those things in any other religious book in the world.

The Bible is unique. And the Bible tells us that God is a jealous God.

Webster defines jealousy: "Earnest concern or solicitude; painful apprehension of rivalry in cases nearly affecting one's happiness; painful suspicion of the faithfulness of husband, wife, or lover."

It is estimated that 20% to 35% of all murders involve a jealous lover. A third of all couples in counseling have a problem with jealousy. It's common for a jilted lover to threaten suicide.

At first jealousy and God seem mutually exclusive. They don't seem to go together.

Bruce Goettsche writes:

"When we think of jealousy we think of someone who suffocates us with their suspicions. They're so threatened by others that they read into every situation a threat to their relationship. We think of jealousy as a bad thing.

However, jealousy is also a good thing. Because we are jealous for our children we will rise up to defend them when they're attacked. Because we are jealous (or

passionate) for our marriage we will get agitated with someone who threatens the one we love, or who threatens our relationship. That's the positive jealousy.

God is jealous for us in that way. He wants us as His own. He loves us. He doesn't want anyone or anything stepping between us. And when something does step between us, God is angry. He calls idolatry spiritual adultery. And that's an appropriate image. God wants us to avoid compromise because He loves us and doesn't want anything to disrupt our relationship with Him.”

Jehovah God said in verse 14, “If you want to call me by name, call me Jealous.”

You can't mix truth and error and still have truth. In April of last year a disgruntled church member put arsenic in the church coffee pot in a little church in Maine. One man died and 13 others were hospitalized.

The people said the coffee did taste a little bitter, but it wasn't bitter enough to stop them from drinking it. Coffee lovers are a determined bunch.

The water in the pot was pure. The coffee was just regular coffee. The cream and sugar was just that, cream and sugar. The only noxious element was some arsenic.

When you mix poison with a bunch of neutral ingredients the neutral doesn't cancel out the effects of the poison, the little bit of poison contaminates the other ingredients.

That's why God was so adamant about His people remaining separate.

Here's the danger: **Read 15-16**

God's saying, “You'll get sucked right in to false ways of thinking and you won't even realize it's happening.

There's nothing wrong with talking about right and wrong. It isn't hate speech to say what God says about sin and false worship.

Many “Christian” churches today catering to the idea that anything is OK. If the people want to accept homosexuality, the theologians find some way to claim that they can worship God with that lifestyle. If people are too “smart” for creation, they create a doctrine to try to combine evolution and creation. If people want to be

entertained, then they are willing to throw away any mention of sin, and do whatever they can to bring people into the church.

If people don't want to hear about hell, then they don't talk about it. If some psychological fad is sweeping the nation they jump right on the band wagon.

What are we ending up with in America? The poison of false teaching is corrupting God's truth.

Many times rather than the church influencing the underlying attitudes of our culture, the culture is shaping the church.

More and more I find people in our evangelical churches who say they can't accept that people who die with out Christ are really lost even though the Bible couldn't be any plainer.

I hear people saying they don't believe that the Bible is sufficient to deal with the really tough problems in their life, even though the Bible claims to be sufficient.

Others want to argue that marriage isn't necessarily between a man and a woman because Christ said love one another, and it would be unloving to limit people.

People choose churches because of the worship style rather than the church doctrine.

What's going on? We've become inoculated with so many false religious ideas that we've lost the ability to discern truth from error.

God said to His people, no covenants, no alliances, no compromise, just obey Me. Just obey me. No golden calves, no false worship, just hang onto my truth.

- I. *God Is A God Of Second Chances*
- II. *But God is Also A Holy God Who Demands Exclusive Worship*
- III. *God's Glory Will Be Reflected In Us In Direct Proportion To The Time We Spend In God's Presence*

In verses 18-28 God gives a series of laws and commands for His people.

Then 40 days later Moses comes down off the mountain with the two new stone tablets.

Last time he was gone for 6 weeks the people got restless and ended up making a golden calf.

I have to believe that this time was very different. this time they knew Moses would be back. This time Moses being gone for 6 weeks was OK.

I have to believe that every day they must have watched for him to come down the mountain path.

Finally they see him. **read 29-30**

That must have been a really weird experience. Can't you see Moses coming down the trail lugging these two stone tablets. He gets near the camp and he notices something strange.

Little kids are running scared. People are standing their with their mouths hanging open. Moses takes a step forward and everyone else takes a step back.

Finally someone tells him. He isn't sunburned. Moses was a middle eastern man with a dark complexion, probably tough and leathery from years of desert. He wasn't red faced, he was glowing with the radiance of the glory of God.

The Bible says the skin of his face shone. Could you imagine being Zipporah. She was married to the guy. He's gone for 6 weeks at a time alone up on the mountain.

Finally he gets back. You go to bed that night and your whole tent is lit up. Finally you say, Moses will you please turn over and put a pillow over your face. The light's keeping me up.

Read 31-35

Notice, that Moses reflected God's glory because he had just come from God's presence. He had spent time with God and it showed in Moses' face and in his heart. The glory would fade until Moses met with God again. And the same will be true for us.

We won't glow in the dark like Moses but God's glory will be reflected in us in direct proportion to the time we spend in God's presence.

It's no accident that right after the commands to avoid compromise there are a number of commands regarding worship. God told the Israelites to remember the festivals, and remember the religious rites that were symbols of their relationship with God. God knows that the best way to avoid compromise with false ideas is to have a close relationship with Him.

It makes sense. If you spend the majority of your time thinking like the culture and very little time with God it shouldn't be a surprise that the culture is going to influence you more than the Lord. If we want to reflect God to a lost world, we have to spend time . . . significant time . . . with the Almighty.

Just remember, spending time in church and spending time with God aren't necessarily the same thing. You can go through all kinds of religious ritual without ever opening your heart to God. You can have an exciting experience in a worship service and still be focused on yourself.

We won't reflect God's glory unless we spend time . . . quality time, with God. We need to spend time, we need to seek God in prayer, we need to diligently listen and apply God's Word.

And we have to be honest with ourselves

In fact, we also need to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves. You and I need to be looking for areas in our lives where we're starting to compromise with evil. We need to confront the excuses and rationalizations of our lives. We need to be serious about discipleship.

We know we need to get serious to get ahead in business. We know we need to be serious if we want to get good grades in school. We need to be serious if we want to win in sports. We need to be serious if we want to lose weight. We know we need to be serious about things that are important in our lives.

So why aren't we more serious about developing our faith? Why aren't we more serious about rooting out the areas of compromise from our lives? Could it be that we're not more serious about these things because we're not serious about our relationship with Christ?

That's a painful question, but an important one. We have to be willing to ask ourselves: How serious am I about following Jesus Christ? How serious am I about reflecting Christ to a lost world? Am I serious enough to give God real time? Am I serious enough to change behaviors that are wrong? Am I serious enough to do things God's way rather than my own way?

Following the great London fire in 1666, the architect Sir Christopher Wren received a royal patent to design and rebuild St. Paul's Cathedral. Wren personally supervised the construction, which took 35 years to complete.

When St. Paul's was finished in 1710, one contemporary wrote in his diary that the cathedral was "terrible" and "awful."

Today if we spent half our lifetime constructing a building and some newspaper reviewer called it "terrible" and "awful" we wouldn't appreciate it too much.

But in 1710 that was quite a compliment. He was terror-struck at the cathedral's height and full of awe at its matchless beauty. Wren had created a dome 110 feet across, soaring 368 feet in the air.

I stood under that dome with Fred Kornis a few years ago, and he bellowed out at the top of his booming voice, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised!"

At least 98 Japanese tourists all spun around in unison and aimed their video cameras at us.

The words "terrible" and "awful" were used by the guy seeing the inside of St. Paul's Cathedral for the first time to convey the feelings this imposing structure evoked in him.

Quintin Morrow writes this: *"One of the sadder commentaries on modern life is that all of our medical, scientific, and technological accomplishments, and all the advances in cinematography, computer-generated reality, and access to information have left us a people unable to be awed.*

We have explored sub-atomic space, mastered micro-technology, and cloned sheep. Yet most of us, despite the exponentially increasing wonders in the world around us, shuffle through daily life un-awed, uninspired, and underwhelmed."

There's not a whole lot that causes us to be awestruck. And along with our loss of an ability to be awed has come a corresponding loss in our sense of awe at the holiness of God.

Moses knew first hand that God is awesome. You could see it on his face.

Can people see the wonder on your face? Does God astound you with His holy love that sent His Son to the cross for you?

Are you just overwhelmed with the frightening realization of God's terrible wrath and indignation at your sin?

Do you stand in awe at your Creator who became your Savior?

Have you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and been saved?