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Volume XV
Issue 356

Growing in the Realization of God

Part 1 of 2

by — Robert McMahon

THE REALIZATION OF GOD

*Therefore, I also, on hearing of this faith of yours in the Lord Jesus, and that for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may be giving you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the **realization** of Him* (Ephesians 1:15-17).

There are many great and noble thoughts which beckon our attention, many grand and glorious goals toward which we stretch, yet few are more profound than Paul's prayer that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may be giving us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the *realization of Him!*

It is, in one sense, a simple statement, yet in another perhaps more than our finite minds can truly grasp. Think of it – to *realize God!* To know deeply Who and What He is; to recognize Him as El Supreme, or, as He revealed Himself to Abraham, as *El Shaddai*, the One Who Suffices (Genesis 14:18; 17:1)!

Oh, that we might realize Him as,

The One God, the Father, out of Whom all is (I Corinthians 8:6).

The eyes of the hearts of so many of His saints have not been enlightened with the realization of Him.

Realization is a prevalent theme in many of Paul's later epistles. It seems, in fact, to be a very necessary

companion of maturity in Christ. He prays that the saints might be brought into a realization of the will of God (Colossians 1:9), and that all mankind might be brought into a realization of the truth (I Timothy 2:4; II Timothy 2:25).

He speaks of the realization of the secret of God and the realization of the Son of God (Colossians 2:2; Ephesians 4:13). Concerning the Philippians he prays that their love may be superabounding more and more in realization and all sensibility (Philippians 1:9); and to Philemon he writes,

*That the fellowship of your faith may become operative in the **realization** of every good thing which is in us for Christ Jesus* (Philemon 6).

Yet all of these transcendent thoughts are but stepping stones to a much higher realization: the realization of God (Colossians 1:10).

What does it mean to have a realization of God? It is that question to which this study is devoted.

In any study it is most helpful first to set clearly in mind the meaning of the terms involved. What does Paul mean by the word "*realization*"?

The Greek word is *epignosis* (on-knowledge). The *King James Version* renders this "*knowledge*" 16 times, and in its other occurrences it is rendered "*acknowledged*" 3 times and "*acknowledgement*" once.

(see **REALIZATION**, page 3211)

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- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
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 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
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REALIZATION (continued from front page)

It is true that the word comes from the root, *gnosis*, which is properly rendered “knowledge”; but the difference between *gnosis* and *epignosis* should not be ignored.

REALIZATION REQUIRES AN ASSOCIATION WITH A PREVIOUSLY KNOWN FACT

It is not simply knowledge for which the apostle petitions in our behalf. The irreverent and unjust men indicted by Paul in the first chapter of Romans had a *knowledge* of God (:21), but they did not glorify or thank Him *as God*. They knew God, but failed to associate with Him all of the glory which is rightly His. This is the significance of this *on-knowledge* of which Paul speaks. It requires an association of some sort of an event or experience with a previously known fact.

Perhaps a scriptural example will help to illustrate (Romans 10:2). The Jews had a zeal of God, but not in accord with recognition, or realization (for it is the same Greek word, *epignosis*).

The *Authorized Version* again uses “knowledge,” but are we to infer that the Jews had no knowledge of God? How can this be? To what other nation had God revealed Himself in so many ways? Indeed, to the Jews were given the covenants, and the legislation, and the divine service, and the promises (Romans 9:4).

It was not the *knowledge* of God which was lacking in them, but rather the *realization* (recognition) of God. In this case, they failed to make the vital *connection* between God and His righteousness, for they were too busy trying to establish their own (Romans 10:3).

VITAL IMPORTANCE OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD

The word *realization* or recognition better suits the thoughts which Paul would have us grasp. The apostle would have us associate with God all that accompanies the title of Deity.

He is not a man; He is the God Who formed man. Why then is He so often regarded as just another creature? How often do we judge God, and in what

light and by whose standards of righteousness? How often do we question His methods? How often do we doubt His Word?

Many of His saints have sought, though perhaps unintentionally, to rob God of His Deity. We have failed on so many occasions to realize Who He is: Almighty God, the Most High, the Supreme, the One Who Suffices, the Creator, the Deity, the Father!

It is not enough merely to know these titles; we must *recognize* their significance and become acquainted with God, *as God*.

A proper *realization* of Him will *greatly* influence our walk as believers. Our attitudes toward saint and sinner, our relationships with friends and enemies cannot help but be tremendously affected. Our heavenly Father will be magnified in our sights, and our praise and worship of Him will be as never before. A realization of Him will increase our maturity and love and give us a peace which is superior to every frame of mind.

This study is intended to point us toward that end of which Paul writes:

*Therefore we also, from the day on which we hear, do not cease praying for you and requesting that you may be filled full with the **realization** of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, you to walk worthily of the Lord for all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in the **realization** of God (Colossians 1:9-10).*

A REALIZATION OF GOD’S WAYS

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” saith Jehovah. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9 ASV).

The recognition of God is terribly hindered by the reasoning that God thinks and acts as a man. The passage before us should clearly demonstrate the error of such logic. He does not think like we do, nor are His methods those which we would choose. ►

The fundamental difference which exists between God and man is vital to realization.

While it is true that God is often referred to in Scripture as though He is human or has human characteristics, we must realize that this is only done in *His* condescension.

Our hearts are filled with praise and thanksgiving for the loving-kindness of the Most High Who remembers us in our low estate (Psalm 136:23), and condescends to reveal Himself in human terms *for our understanding*. However, let us not take the *figures of speech* farther than is intended. It is one thing when God chooses to reveal Himself in *terms within our human perception*; it is altogether another when man seeks to make God a *permanent resident* of the “human condition.”

So, when we read of God’s mighty arm and strong hand (Psalm 89:13) we should be careful to confine these attributes to the context of the figure, its purpose being to facilitate our limited comprehension and perceptions as human beings. We need not to infer that God, Who is Spirit, possesses literal human features nor that He thinks and acts as a human being. As is the case in all figures of likeness, they depend on unlikeness.

CONTRASTS BETWEEN GOD AND US

Man is mortal. From the moment our first parents ate of the fruit which God had commanded them not to eat, death has been working in the flesh of mankind (Romans 5:12). We are dying creatures. It is something that we cannot avoid.

Death is often thought of as a single event which marks the end of life. It is more correct, however, to think of death as a process which operates from the very beginning of life to its end.

This inherent mortality carries with it many shortcomings. Our physical and mental abilities are limited. Sin becomes operative in our flesh.

God, on the other hand, is not mortal. He is a vivifying Spirit. While our lives are constantly fleeing away from us, God is giving to all life and breath and all

(Acts 17:25). While difficulties prevent us from accomplishing, nothing is too hard for Yahweh (Genesis 18:14). While men make promises that they cannot keep, the Lord is not slack concerning His promises (II Peter 3:9). While we purpose, at times, to do the impossible, with God all is possible (Matthew 19:26).

The vast gulf which exists between God and man must not be forgotten if we are to possess a realization of Him. Let us cite one example from Scripture which will help to clarify this distinction.

In the Genesis 12, God promises to make of Abram a great nation, that in him all of the nations of the earth shall be blessed. This covenant also included a land which would be given to Abram and his seed (:7). Abram was seventy-five years old when this covenant was made, and he and Sarai, his wife, were childless. Over the years God continually reminds Abram of His promise that He would make Abram’s seed as the dust of the earth for number (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:5-6, 13-14, 18-21). All the while Abram is growing older, and still there is no seed for him.

In the midst of this waiting, there is a marvelous verse of Scripture which reveals God’s ways and His thoughts.

He [God] brought him [Abram] forth outside and said, “Look now toward the heavens, and number the stars if you can number them.” And He promised him, “Thus shall your seed become.” And Abram believed on Elohim; and He is reckoning it to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:5-6).

IT IS RIGHT TO BELIEVE GOD

Abram believes God! What a wonderful statement! God’s way required faith – total belief and complete reliance on the One Who Suffices.

Abram was right to believe God, despite his age and the age of his wife, and the fact that he had no son. This was God’s way. Faith in the Supreme, this was the key to the promise; and lest we neglect to notice, let us point out that the covenant between God and Abram was totally one-sided. It was unconditional and required nothing on Abram’s part but faith. Thus we have the first instance of faith-righteousness, the



same means by which God is operating in this present administration of the secret.

Soon man's thoughts and ways begin to creep in. Abram is now eighty-five and still without a son. Sarai reasons that this is because Yahweh has restrained her from bearing (Genesis 16:2).

Actually, she was right; but rather than leading to a realization of God's ways, her thoughts led to a demonstration of man's. She told Abram to take Hagar, her Egyptian handmaid, in the hopes that she would obtain children by her (:2). Abram consented and Hagar conceived and bare him a son named Ishmael.

They should have realized that God did not need their help; but they were not thinking as He was thinking. Their thoughts required another method which revealed the shortcomings of their faith. God's assurances concerning the promise had produced no tangible results, so they took matters into their own hands, and to be sure, it produced for them a son. However, Ishmael was not the son of the promise; he was the son of the flesh.

THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION: THE CUTTING OF THE FLESH

It is soon after this that God institutes the covenant of circumcision. This covenant is full of significance and should lead us into a further realization of His ways.

Circumcision is the cutting away of the flesh of the foreskin. Every male in Abraham's¹ household, whether born into it or purchased with money, was to be circumcised.

There is a lesson in this act if we will learn it. Circumcision signified the cutting away of the flesh. Flesh was to have no part in God's dealings with Abraham or Israel or the nations. The cutting away of a tiny bit of flesh becomes representative of the flesh as a whole. It must be removed, for it stands in the way!

Abraham and Sarah thought, perhaps, that they were doing God a favor. All they saw involved in the

1. Abram's name was changed at this point to Abraham, as was Sarai's to Sarah

covenant was their own mortal bodies whose reproductive capacities were fast fading away.

Their thoughts led them to another way – the way of works of the flesh. Their retreat from the faith did not demonstrate their realization of God, but rather their ignorance of Him. God had revealed Himself to Abraham as *El Shaddai* – the One Who Suffices (Genesis 17:1) – yet now he doesn't seem to realize the significance of that title.

The God Who purposed to do the thing, He will bring it to pass (Isaiah 46:11). The flesh is not necessary and must be cut away and destroyed. Ishmael could not fulfill the promise, for he was a child of the flesh, not of faith.

So Abraham was ninety-nine and still without the son he had been promised and, from the human standpoint, without hope. Yet God assures him that Sarah would bear him a son. To complicate matters (from the human standpoint, once again), Sarah is physically incapable of conceiving (Genesis 18:11). There is no possible physical way, at this point, that Abraham and Sarah can produce a child.

Is that not the point? The flesh has finally been destroyed, it has been cut away. All that is left for them now is to rely on the One Who Suffices.

Yahweh visits Sarah as He had said, and Yahweh is doing for Sarah as He had spoken. Sarah is pregnant and is bearing for Abraham a son for his old age, at the appointed time of which Elohim had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who is born to him, whom Sarah bears for him, Isaac (Genesis 21:1-3).

As long as there was but a flicker of reproductive potential left in their flesh the promise could not be fulfilled. God waited until Abraham and Sarah had no choice but to believe Him. As we saw in the first place, this was the right thing to do.

GOD'S WAYS ARE RIGHT

So we see man's thoughts and ways. They are centered on his mortal flesh. God's ways are higher than ours and His thoughts are far superior to ours. ►



We therefore cannot question His thinking or judge His ways. At the time of this writing a very dear friend in the Lord has been put to repose. The loss is tragic, and compounded by her youth – only twenty-four years. Immediately my thoughts are tempted to turn to questions of, “Why?” I do not understand God’s way in this matter, yet I find peace in a much higher thought: resist the questions of “Why?” and seek your comfort in the realization that He is God!

This fact *alone* should make us realize that His ways are truly righteous and His thoughts are truly wise.

GOD’S WISDOM

Alleging themselves to be wise they are made stupid and they change the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of an image of a corruptible human being and flying creatures and quadrupeds and reptiles (Romans 1:22-23).

A realization of God will *never* come out of our own human understanding. Indeed, there are *too many obstacles* to that realization which have been placed in our mortal flesh. We have already seen that our ways are not God’s nor His ways ours, and neither are our thoughts His thoughts. Our minds are *bound* by a myopic condition which prevents us from seeing Him clearly as He is. How then shall we ever hope to have a realization of God?

It is important to note that wisdom always accompanies the realization of God. In Ephesians Paul prays that God,

*May be giving you a spirit of **wisdom** ... in the **realization** of Him (1:17).*

In Colossians the apostle requests,

*That you may be filled full with the **realization** of His will, in all **wisdom** and spiritual understanding ... growing in the **realization** of God (1:9, 10).*

Note that in both instances the wisdom comes not from within man, but rather from without. It is not a product of human logic and reasoning, but, like all that is ours in Christ, it is a gracious gift. All is of God!

GOD’S WISDOM SEEMS FOOLISHNESS; MAN’S WISDOM IS FOOLISHNESS

We often think ourselves to be wise, and by human standards many of us are; but in relation to God our wisdom is stupidity.

As high as the heavens are above the earth, so is His wisdom higher than ours. What seems to be wisdom to mortal man is foolishness to God. The opposite is true, also.

The cross,² for example, is stupidity to those who are perishing, but for us who realize its saving power it is wise beyond measure (I Corinthians 1:18). By human standards, it seems utter foolishness to send the King of all of the earth to establish His kingdom, only to have Him murdered by those who would be His subjects. Man’s wisdom would not have included Calvary. However, does not God make stupid the wisdom of this world (I Corinthians 1:20)? The events of the cross had to take place, for without His death there could be no resurrection; without His resurrection, more forlorn than all men are we (I Corinthians 15:19). This “*foolishness*” on God’s part³ provides redemption and reconciliation for all. Truly,

The stupidity of God is wiser than men (I Corinthians 1:25).

Mankind’s soulish condition is largely responsible for his ignorance of the wisdom of God, for the soulish man is not receiving those things which are of the spirit of God (I Corinthians 2:14). It is the spirit of God which reveals His wisdom, for the spirit is searching all, even the depths of God (I Corinthians 2:10).

Once again, this reinforces the fact that the wisdom we are considering is not a *product* of man’s intellect. Mankind apart from God could not hope to have a realization of Him, for the spirit of humanity is acquainted only with that which is human. God does not qualify. Yet, we have obtained the spirit which is

2. i.e., “An upright stake or pale, without any crosspiece.” – A.E. Knoch (*Concordant Keyword Concordance*, page 63)

3. There is much misunderstanding concerning the actual part played by God in the crucifixion. The reader should consider the following passages in this regard: Acts 1:16-17; 2:23; 3:17-18; 4:27-28; I Corinthians 2:7-8; I Peter 1:19-20; Revelation 13:8.



of God that we may be perceiving that which is being graciously given to us by God (I Corinthians 2:12).

It is interesting to note the contrast between God's wisdom and man's. God's wisdom is spoken among the mature (I Corinthians 2:6). It is taught by the spirit (I Corinthians 2:13) and is examined spiritually (I Corinthians 2:14).

Man's stupidity is magnified by his inability to examine spiritually the things of God. He rejects the teaching of the spirit and clings to the traditions and doctrines which are a product of human wisdom. He is soulish, rather than spiritual. Even many of God's saints are heeding their feelings and emotions, their physical sensations rather than the dictates of the spirit. Indeed, they are lacking maturity.

All of this hinders a proper realization of God and His ways. To remedy this we are given the very mind of Christ to teach us and lead us into a realization of the wisdom of God!

Paul would, therefore, have us receive God's wisdom and reject the wisdom of the world, for it obstructs the path to a realization of Him. Yet this is not an easy lesson to learn.

Indeed, those spoken of in Romans chapter 1 did not learn it. They changed His incorruptible glory to corruption. They gave His invisible attributes form, both human and animal. They reasoned this to be wise, but their wisdom was made stupidity and their reasoning was made vain. We could almost excuse such actions on the grounds that they were attempting to bring God into a realm which was easier to understand. Yet in doing so the Creator of heaven and earth is dragged down and consigned to mere creaturehood.

They confine God, Who is spirit, in flesh and blood. The glory of God is degraded to corruptible forms. The truth of God is altered into a lie (Romans 1:25).

Knowing God, not as God do they glorify or thank Him! (Romans 1:21).

Paul's charges in Romans chapters 1-3 are against all mankind, which includes you and me.

For all sinned and are wanting of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Even as believers, we still often rely on our own wisdom, and that wisdom fails on two counts:

First, to recognize ourselves as creatures, and,

Second, to recognize God as Creator.

We confine Him to forms and limit Him in power. We reason that He thinks like we do, and we assume His wisdom to be like our own. We wind up offering divine service to the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25).

For the cause of physical understanding we anthropomorphize God when we should be praying, as the apostle Paul, that God would fill us full of spiritual understanding. For it is God's spirit of wisdom which brings us into a proper realization of Him – a recognition of our insignificance and His deity! Then shall we bow before our Creator, Who is blessed for the eons! Amen! (Romans 1:25; I Timothy 1:17).

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

What, then, shall we be declaring? Not that there is injustice with God? May it not be coming to that! For to Moses He is saying, "I shall be merciful to whomever I may be merciful, and I shall be pitying whomever I may be pitying." Consequently, then, it is not of him who is willing, nor of him who is racing, but of God, the Merciful. For the Scripture is saying to Pharaoh that "For this selfsame thing I rouse you up, so that should be displaying in you My power, and so that My name should be published in the entire earth." Consequently, then, to whom He will, He is merciful, yet whom He will, He is hardening (Romans 9:14-18).

A readjustment of our thinking concerning God is necessary to a realization of Him. We have already seen how our wisdom falls far short of His. Ours degrades the Creator and promotes the creature. Our wisdom transforms us into a race of mini-gods whose wills compete with the will of the One God, the Father, out of Whom all is! Were we really ►





wise, we would see how utterly stupid this is and humbly acquiesce in the realization of His magnificence and our insignificance.

Our sense of justice is equally warped. The ninth chapter of Romans, which should *further* enlighten the eyes of our hearts in the realization of God, has often become a stumbling block to that realization. The truth of Isaiah 55:8-9 is easily forgotten and we judge God by our own human standards of justice.

Oh that men would grasp the error of such thoughts and seek the forgiveness of the One they offend!

HIS JUDGMENTS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT

God's judgments are not understood by many of His saints. His dealings with mankind often leave us questioning His justice, but let us remind ourselves that He is the only just judge (II Timothy 4:8). Abraham realized this, and it would serve us well to look at Genesis 18 before we examine some specific aspects of God's justice.

The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were very grievous in the sight of Yahweh (:20). God was

about to pass judgment on their wickedness. Concerning the destruction of these cities, Abraham asks a rhetorical question:

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?
(:25).

No answer is required. It is really a statement, yet how many recognize its significance? The judge of all of the earth shall do right!

Despite this assurance, our faith finds it difficult to accept. His dealings with the individuals mentioned in Romans 9 seem unfair to us, but that is because we are using our own twisted concepts of justice as the guide. We would have no trouble with this chapter and other portions of His holy Word if we would realize the folly of calling into judgment the only Being in the universe competent to be called judge. So in entering into any study of God's dealings with mankind we must keep this truth foremost in our minds: the judge of all the earth shall do judgment, and His judgments are always right! If we fail to recognize this, we are liable to come to the false conclusion that God is unjust (Romans 9:14).

(To be continued.)

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