**How Do I Find a Gracious God**

Based on [John 8:31-36](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn8.31-36)

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Reformation Day (Observed)

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There’s no such thing as an atheist, someone who doesn’t know there is a God. The fool says in his heart “There is no God”, but that’s more of a rebellion, a decision to resist...he doesn’t really believe it. On the contrary, it is apparent that many atheists have a lot of spite and resentment towards the God whom they don’t believe in. Men like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens have a very specific description of the God that they despise so much. It is because they know Him that they know just what it is about him that they despise.

And why shouldn’t they? Didn’t God create this world, and doesn’t evil, suffering and death prevail here? They are convinced that Almighty God is either evil, or at least indifferent towards our suffering. He could help, but he doesn’t. Radical **Atheists don’t hate the idea of a God or even of a gracious God.** What they hate is the fact that God, who is gracious, won’t end all suffering and evil right now, and so he doesn’t deserve to be worshipped. Because he claims to be gracious and yet tolerates evil, they consider him evil.

Go back in time 500 years ago to the Reformation. The latter days of the “dark ages”, as it were. “How could a gracious God allow suffering and evil” wasn’t even a serious question. The wrath of God and the sinfulness of man was widely preached and widely believed back then. And if you believe sin and wrath, suffering and evil makes sense.

Rather, the question that had to be settled was, “Is God even gracious.” Doctrinally the answer was yes. But for a man named Martin Luther it wasn’t that simple. For Luther the question was, ***how can a God who expects of us more than we can do really be called gracious***?

Martin Luther believed that God required of him a perfection that he was incapable of. He tried what the church of his day suggested: fasting, fervent prayer, penance, a monastic life of chastity and other vows. But he was honest with himself. **He found that none of these “evangelical counsels” gave him peace.**  It’s not that he resented the hard work and discipline of his vows. He would’ve venerated innumerable relics and said as many Hail Mary’s happily, cheerfully if only they did any good. He feared God’s wrath, and if he could save his soul by works, he would happily work.

**Luther tried to please a perfect God, and he found he couldn’t do it.**  So many people today are offended by people judging them...it’s only because they forget that God will judge them. Luther knew that God is a Judge, who sees all and knows all. Your neighbor only sees your actions, you only know your thoughts...but God knows you better than you know yourself. That is comforting if God means to help you; terrifying if he means to judge you.

We have a judging God. We have a wrathful God. God wiped out nearly every single human being with a flood. God destroyed Sodom with fire and sulphur. God sent poisonous snakes to bite his own people who were grumbling against Him. God destroyed Jerusalem, the city who stoned his prophets and crucified his Son. And God will come again to Judge the living and the dead. And those who have done Good will inherit eternal life, and those who have done evil, everlasting punishment.

Today it seems the world denies a wrathful God. Some treat these accounts as mere superstition, and go on with their lives. Others, like radical atheists, hate God for it, thinking that a loving God would never punish anyone. Luther’s conscience was too refined for these conclusions. He knew that going on with his life was pointless without knowing how to prepare for death. He knew that accusing God of evil, (even if it were true), wouldn’t matter. God is still God. So he was left with this dilemma: *God is wrathful against sin whether I like it or not. He will punish evildoers forever in unquenchable fire; and only the righteous will inherit eternal life with Him. The only chance that I have with a wrathful God, is to plead for mercy. The only hope I have for mercy is if this wrathful God is a gracious God too. I know I have a wrathful God. How can I find a gracious God?*

*You find a Gracious God when you find out that the Wrathful God who sent His own Son to live a perfect life in your place, and die a sacrificial death in your place.*  The wrathful God knows that you cannot love him perfectly or love your neighbor as yourself. The wrathful God knows your sins and your guilt and he knows you better than you know yourself. But the wrathful God is a gracious God. He is gracious to you, cares for you, and wants you to have salvation. You cannot accomplish this by your own efforts. But the wrathful God is the gracious God forgives you all your sins for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ. You have not kept his commandments; but All God’s commandments are fulfilled when what is not done is forgiven.”

Forgiveness is the freedom Christ speaks about today. He says, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Free from what? Free from the wrath of God that your sins deserve. And freedom from the sin that held you in bondage by nature. Freed in Christ you have now been given His Holy Spirit to begin a good work in you. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.