

PLAIN TRUTH®

inside

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

Creating God in Our Own Image

By Greg Albrecht

"You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do."—Anne Lamott

From the beginning of time humans have busied themselves with attempts to bring God down to earth—to shrink him and make him easier to understand—to make him more human. The Old Testament is filled with examples of golden calves, shrines in high places and sacrifices and offerings (some required as a part of the old covenant and others not so much). Appeasing and pleasing God was very much a part of the mindset of the old covenant and of course very much a part of how humans naturally perceive God.

The basic human mindset about God goes something like this:

1) *Of course God is more powerful than we are and much smarter...but*

in many ways he is just like us...only more advanced.

2) *Dealing with God successfully involves treating him like other humans whom you want to impress and please. God is "in charge"—like our parents were when we were young and like our boss is at work. So do what he wants and be on your best behavior when he is "around." That will keep him happy.*

3) *Dealing with God successfully involves "not waking him up" by doing things he does not like. If you wake him up he will not be happy and neither will you.*

But God begs to differ with the way in which we pigeonhole him and turn him into a more "manageable" God.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "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, my emphasis).

Our ways and our thoughts are not one and the same as God's ways and thoughts. God has his ways and his thoughts are incomparably higher than our ways and thoughts. God is not like us.

God is something different. Way better—in fact he is perfect. He is higher and more noble and gracious—filled with love, mercy and grace. He is eternal and immortal—we are not. It might

seem obvious that his ways and thoughts are higher than our own, since he is Creator and we are creatures, but our thoughts and ways don't always assume that to be true, do they?

As a young boy, I used to sit with my mother on my grandmother's front porch, on North 8th Street in Herington, Kansas, as we looked into the summer sky. Herington was and still is a small Kansas town, so neon signs and city lights didn't hamper the magnificent heavenly spectacle presented without charge each night of the summer.

As we sat there, often surrounded by fireflies, my mother would tell me that my father (who was killed when I was only 15 months old) was one of those stars twinkling up in the sky. My mother was my ultimate authority for everything at that time, so for a number of years I thought my father whom I never knew was "up there" with God.

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 1

But as I matured and grew, I realized my father was not a twinkling star any more than Santa Claus delivered presents to all the children of the world on one night. But the idea of God being “up there” stayed with me. Perhaps you have had some similar ideas about God.

The vast majority of people who believe in God believe he is in a singular, precise heavenly location. God is way too small for most people. I once heard an impassioned preacher explain to his congregation that “God is about 6’2” and he weighs about 220 pounds—about the same as my height and weight.”

We do love to shrink God down to our size—we do love to make God into our image and our likeness. The preacher was doing what most humans tend to do—he was making God over into an image that is about the same size as we are—maybe a little bigger and a little smarter, but not that much.

I never knew my earthly father, and while I was taught about God for many decades of my life, I now realize much of what I was taught was erroneous, so I never really knew much about my heavenly Father either. By the grace of God, over the past few decades, I have grown in Christ to know my heavenly Father.

Have you ever thought about the huge difference in knowing about God and knowing God?

One way to think about *the difference in knowing about God and actually knowing God* is to think about the love we humans can experience. One can read about love and learn about love—sometimes the knowledge is accurate and sometimes it is mythical and mystical.

Knowledge, to the degree it is accurate or not, is just knowledge. But when one actually experiences and is immersed and is head-over-heels “in love,” one realizes the distinction between knowing *about* love and being *in* love.

Many people think of God as confined to heaven—sitting on this throne while angels are constantly scurrying around, giving him reports about breaking news from all over the universe—especially what is going on here on earth.

Many people perceive God, after hearing those reports, leaning over, looking out his huge heavenly picture window, peering down at all of us here on earth and frowning. Sometimes they think God must shake his head in disappointment. Their God is too small—he is a disenchanted God who is far away and ashamed and disappointed in them.

“Your God is Too Small”

A few hours ago I was looking for one of my favorite books—with no success. I’ve been drastically whittling down my library of books because 1) I don’t need many of them and 2) I am thinking that now, in my early 70s, is a good time to get rid of a lot of stuff that I have accumulated...so others don’t have to later.

But, and perhaps this has happened to you as well, when one stores a book or other item in a particular place for many years, and then upsets the entire course of human history by moving or discarding said book or item, chaos can result. “*Where did I put that book? That book was a keeper—surely I didn’t throw it away!*”

I finally did locate *Your God is Too Small* by J.B. Phillips, but in all fairness, it is a “small” paperback—perhaps one of the smallest books I own. Ironically, *Your God is Too Small* was lost among bigger books.

J.B. Phillips was a professor of Greek, who completed an excellent translation of the New Testament, and among other books, wrote this compact but profound little book



The BIG God of unlimited grace and unconditional love cannot be tamed by religious authorities, theologians or biblical scholars.

he titled *Your God is Too Small*. He fills this superb little book with stereotypes of God many of us have believed—from a policeman to a doting grandfather to a God who demands absolute perfection to a God who is forever annoyed and aggravated with us.

Many within Christ-less religion have been taught and consequently believe in an angry God who is upset with them—a small-minded little God who is preoccupied with vengeance and payback, rather than the eternal and forever forgiveness revealed to us in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Many who are brainwashed and held captive by religious misrepresentations of God are so busy pleasing and appeasing the God they are already convinced about, they have no clue how to find the God they have never known.

So much about God is revealed to us in and through the teachings of Jesus, but many people completely miss that God because they think they already know him. Sadly, many wonderful people, with distorted ideas about God, are only interested in reinforcing and conforming to the distorted God they know.

The diluted, diminished and devalued mini-god of Christ-less religion is only concerned with maintaining the status quo of religion.

J.B. Phillips wrote *Your God is Too Small* to help us take God out of our pigeonholes and out of the religious boxes into which we and

others have placed him, in the process deflating, dissecting, diminishing and devaluing him.

- We tend to categorize and shrink God. We tend to mash him up into bite-sized chunks. We pulverize him in our blender so that we can digest him more easily.

- We prefer a smaller God because a small God is a God we can manage, control and manipulate. A small God is safe—he does what we want him to do when we want him to do it.

- We like a vending-machine God who will dispense the answers to our prayers and requests when we put it in the right “currency” in terms of prayers and efforts.

- We like to think of God as a genie in a bottle whom we can summon to take care of those bothersome problems we face.

- We like to think that God can be bargained with like we would bargain with a merchant.

- We like to think that we can persuade God like we persuade a friend or family member.

- We like to think that God will be impressed if we do lots and lots of good things, and in fact he will not only be impressed but he will be in our debt—obligated to do what we want because of all the good stuff we have done for him.

God is Big...Really BIG

Each of us must examine our ideas of God and ask where those ideas came from and more importantly, are they correct and valid, according to the biblical revelation of God, most of all in the person of Jesus Christ.

At the end of all examinations of our ideas about God, we will realize many, if not most, of the images of God we've believed are erroneous. Our God has been far too small.

How big is God?

- Big enough to come into our world in the person of Jesus, and to turn it and all of its religions upside down and right side up.

- Big enough to overcome a world of sin, hatred and corruption by his love.

- Big enough to love the entire world—all of it and all of us—without exception.

- Big enough to love us because that's who he is, rather than loving us based on how well we behave and perform.

God is bigger than anything human religion does to define and confine him within creeds, beliefs, practices, doctrines, dogmas and buildings. God is bigger than any religious attempt to fence him in within denominational boundaries.

The BIG God of unlimited grace and unconditional love cannot be tamed by religious authorities, theologians or biblical scholars.

When God grants us deeper insights into exactly who he is (and isn't), we see him as he is, rather than as we have been taught and brainwashed. God can and will radically change our lives when we realize that God is big enough to handle all our doubts and fears and to blot out our shame and guilt.

Many today who are trapped by ideas of a small God see their

situation as hopeless. They are empty and desperate because they believe what they have been told—that God is remote, passive and non-involved.

They believe that God is so small that he is prone to temper outbursts, and if he really gets upset he will come unglued, throw a hissy fit and punish them out of his wrath.

Why Religion Has Failed

Christ-less religion has failed to teach and preach a BIG God because it has not, in the main, come to grips with the fact that **Jesus Christ is the core of our faith.** *Jesus Christ is the center of true faith—not religious rituals, performances, attendance, programs or human virtue.*

When we focus on Jesus as the absolute center and core of faith, we realize that our relationship with God is because of Jesus, not because of anything we can ever accomplish.

When we focus on Jesus as the absolute center and core of faith, we realize that God loves us unconditionally, by his grace and because of his goodness, not because of our deeds and efforts.

When we focus on Jesus as the absolute center and core of faith, we discover that God's love is endless. We discover that God's love is far beyond anything we can ever imagine. We discover that God's love fills our souls and spirits to overflowing, so that our lives are filled with purpose, meaning and significance.

You and I need a Big God. You and I have a BIG GOD!

We have a Big God who cannot be tamed or shrunk down to the size or dimensions of a religious denomination or its dogmas and doctrines.

- We are given a God, by his grace and love, whose relentless love is for everyone who has ever lived or ever will.

- We are given a God, by his grace and love, who loves all people, who desires to transform and redeem all languages, all cultures, all colors and all religions. *Thank God he is God and we are not.* □

We are given a God, by his grace and love...who desires to transform and redeem all languages, all cultures, all colors and all religions.

