

Misrepresenting God

by Samuel Logan Brengle

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's true character, which is a balance of mercy and severity, and warns against misrepresenting Him.

Scripture: Psalm 50:21-22, Isaiah 1:16-20, Matthew 7:24-27, Matthew 25:46, John 3:36, John 17:3, Romans 1:16-18, Romans 2:4-11, Romans 11:22-23, Hebrews 7:25

Topics: "God's Character", "Mercy and Judgment"

Description

Samuel Logan Brengle emphasizes the importance of accurately representing God's character, warning against the extremes of portraying God solely as merciful or as cruel. He argues that a true understanding of God encompasses both His mercy and severity, as revealed in Scripture. Misrepresentations can lead to false hopes or despair, and it is crucial to recognize that God's love calls for repentance and obedience. Brengle highlights that the Bible provides the authoritative representation of God, balancing His goodness with His judgments. Ultimately, he concludes that true mercy is found in Jesus Christ, who offers salvation to those who trust and obey.

Transcript

I read recently of a speaker who preached on the mercy of God 'until it seemed there was nothing in God but mercy.' But I fear he misrepresented God. Such misrepresentation is easy, and to people who do not think deeply, and who do not want to take life seriously, it is pleasant, but it is unspeakably dangerous.

If we are to win souls and save our own, we must not distort the picture of God's character which we hold up to view. It is life eternal to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John xvii. 3); but it must be the true and holy God, as He is, and not some false god who conforms to our poor little warped human desires and opinions.

Some religious teachers misrepresent God by making Him utterly savage and cruel, and they gloat over unutterably horrid pictures of Hell, where they imagine God delighting in the most exquisite tortures of the damned, and thus men are embittered against God until they feel there is no hope of His mercy.

Others misrepresent God by making Him appear as a sort of goody-goody God, who fawns upon sinners with mawkish sympathy and looks upon worldlings and triflers and lukewarm professors with weak, sentimental, old-womanish pity. Nothing can be further from the truth concerning God. We find God Himself bitterly rebuking those who, living in sin, thought He did not disapprove their ways. He sets before

them a list of their sins (Psalm 1. 17-20), and then says: 'These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' (vv. 21,22.)

The truth lies between these extremes. There is mercy in God, but it is mingled with severity; there is wrath in God, but it is tempered with mercy.

The great soul-winners from Bible times till now have recognized this; they have held an even balance between the goodness and the severity of God, because the Bible does so; and the Bible, of all the innumerable books written, is the only one which gives us an authoritative representation of God.

The book of nature reveals to us the goodness and the severity of God. Fire will not only bake our food, and bless us, but it will also burn us; water will not only quench our thirst and refresh us, but if we trifle with it, it will drown us; if we recognize God's ways of working in nature, and take heed and obey, we shall find nature's laws most kind and helpful; but if we neglect or refuse to obey we shall find them most terrible and destructive.

But if we want to know God in all the richness of His character, and all the fullness of His self-revelation, we must study the Bible and compare Scripture with Scripture.

The Bible tells us of God's unutterable love leading Him to seek sinners in mercy; but His righteousness requires of the sinner penitence, faith, separation from evil, and obedience to His will.

Various Bible descriptions show how God holds an even balance between His mercy and His judgments.

'Behold the goodness and severity of God,' writes Paul: 'on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness; otherwise,' he says (showing that God's goodness does not destroy His severity), 'thou also shalt be cut off.' We must beware! Then he adds a touch of tenderness -- making clear how even in His severity God waits to show mercy -- 'And they also,' though they have been cut off, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.' (Romans xi. 22, 23.)

Again Paul writes, 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto Salvation to every one that believeth..... For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, the just shall live by faith.' And then he adds, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness.' (Romans i. 16-18.)

And again he writes: 'Despise thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil,.....but glory, honor, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile, for there is no respect of persons with' God.' (Romans ii. 4- 11.)

The saving mercy of God revealed in the Scriptures is invariably set over against the wrath of God, as the great mountains are set over against the deep seas.

The writer to the Hebrews says of Jesus, 'He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him' (Hebrews vii. 25): while Paul writes of some upon whom 'wrath is come to the uttermost.' (1 Thessalonians ii. 16.)

There is, then, an uttermost Salvation for all who 'trust and obey,' and an uttermost woe for all who go on in selfish unbelief and worldliness and sin. Truly 'God is not mocked,' and He is a God of judgment.

Again, we find Jesus keeping this even balance when He says that those who hear His sayings and do them are like those who build upon a rock, against which rain and floods and winds cannot prevail, while those who hear and do not obey are like those who build upon sand, which will be swept away by rain and floods and wind. (Matthew vii. 24-27.) And again, He says that the wicked shall 'go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.' (Matthew xxv. 46.)

Again, He tells of the shut door at the marriage, with some on the inside with their Lord, and some on the outside, rejected and unknown; of the joy of their Lord into which good and faithful servants enter, and the outer darkness, into which the wicked and slothful are cast; of the great, fixed gulf which is impassable, with some on the right side in the bosom of comfort and security and peace, and some on the wrong side in the bitter woe of fierce remorse and torment.

We find John the Baptist faithful to this great truth. He cries out, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on Him.' (John iii. 36.)

Likewise all through the Old Testament this even balance is maintained. 'Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but' and here is the unfailing alternative -- 'but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured by the sword.' (Isaiah i. 16-20.)

These Bible word-pictures show us that no one word, not even the sweet word 'mercy,' will sum up the rich and manifold character of God. The Bible says, 'God is love,' but it also says 'Our God is a consuming fire.'

To penitent hearts who trust in Jesus, God will be found to be rich in mercy; but He will defend the moral and spiritual order of His universe by uttermost penalties against those who go on proudly, careless, or wickedly in their own ways.

When Dr. Johnson lay dying he was much concerned about his soul. A friend said to him : 'Sir, you seem to forget the merits of the Redeemer.' 'No,' replied Dr. Johnson, 'I do not forget the merits of the Redeemer, but I remember that He said that He would place some on His right hand, and some on His left.'

Our only hope is in the wounds of Jesus, and the shelter of His Blood. There, and only there, shall we find mercy, since we have sinned; but there mercy is boundless and free. Hallelujah!

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