

# STREAMS of Life

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE INCARCERATED

## Misconceptions of God By Del Burkholder

The last newsletters we wrote on a series of apologetics of the Bible. The next newsletters we are going to look at the apologetics of God. This edition we are looking at misconceptions of God or what God is not.

You would think that writing about God would be simple, but in reality, we find God as vast as the universe He created. God is probably one of the most known words through all of humanity, yet He is very complex to explain and comprehend in our finite minds. We look to the heavens and marvel at what we see. In every civilization there has been a belief in man's heart which points to a deity. You can go through history and whether it is a sky god, volcano god, or some other inordinate object they worshipped; each civilization created some form of a god. In fact, Paul tells us in Romans 2:14-16 that our God put His call in man's heart.

### **A. God is not a visible object in the heavens.**

One of the earliest recognized forms of devotion to a false god was a consistent worship of the sun. Because of the brightness and power of the sun, this was an early devotion of men to presume the sun was a god or the god. From early times men realized there was something special about the sun. It would rise in the morning; it would decide the heat of the day. We can imagine how early man could mistake this source of power for some form of God. Egyptians worshipped the sun god Ra. Baal is described in the Bible in Judges 2:11-15 and 2 Kings 17:16. The argument can be made of Baal not only being a storm god, but the Canaanites also worshipped him as a form of the sun. Other people in early civilizations such as the Pacific Islanders worshipped the sun. The Mayans in Central America were known for their human sacrifices to their sun god. In Ezekiel 8:16 God accused some of the spiritual leaders of Israel of worshipping the sun in the presence of the temple as they looked toward the east.

*Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun. **Ezekiel 8:16***

But the sun in reality is nothing more than a sphere of hydrogen that gives off energy, heat, and light. Scientifically the sun is of great importance, but spiritually speaking nothing to do with deity.

### **B. God is not a human.**

The Roman Emperors also portrayed themselves as gods, believing themselves to be divine. For example, the reprobate Caligula actually demanded to be worshipped as a living god in about 40 AD. This trend of claiming they were gods started before Caligula and continued with later Roman Emperors also. In the book of Acts, people proclaimed Herod to be a god and because he accepted this praise, he was immediately eaten by worms and died (Acts 12:21-23). God is not to be compared to man. In fact, Exodus 20:5 says He is a jealous God and is named Jealous in Exodus 34:14.

The idea of an emperor being god was still intact as late as World War Two with Emperor Hirohito in Japan. After his surrender of Japan, he renounced his divinity and declared himself to be a man. Many cults teach that man could become a little god. This thought even crept into the church to a degree by some self-image teachers trying to over emphasize the goodness of man.

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## Jail House Religion

Jim Newsom is a nationally recognized evangelist and Bible teacher who has ministered in prisons throughout the country. Having served eight years on manslaughter of a 30-year sentence in Florida, Jim was released in 1980. Jim resides in Jeffersonville, IN with his wife, Diane.



Jim Newsom

One of the main ways that you can judge whether the fruit that is being gathered in prison is remaining or not, is if the men and women that come to the Lord stay out of prison once they get out.

The main reason, is what people have come to call "**Jail House Religion**". This is where the inmate wants to be free from jail more than he wants to be free from the things that got him into jail. It's where there is a change of belief without a corresponding change of behavior. It's where the inmate looks to God to escape the consequences of his actions instead of looking to God for forgiveness of his sin and find the strength to face his consequences. "**Jail House Religion**" is motivated by self-preservation, where true conversion is motivated by transformation of self.

There are three reasons that I believe that this phenomena of "**Jail House Religion**" runs so rampant in our penal system. First, most inmates mistaken God's aid to their lives for His approval of their life-style. They think because God helps them then they must be alright. **Romans 5:8 & 10** - "**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!**" (NIV) These verses show two things; 1) That the Lord does and always will demonstrate His love towards sinners, while people are in sin, God will help them. 2) That sinners are an enemy of God, but God hasn't and never will be an enemy to sinners. In the days of Jesus, He was accused of being a "friend of sinners," which tells me that Jesus was always my friend. I didn't recognize that friendship until July of 1972, but once I recognized it, I could look back over my life and see that He was trying to help me all along.

**Luke 6:35** - "**But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil [men.]**" (NASB) The Lord, through Luke, is exhorting us to love, do good, and give to our enemies because that is the way He is. One of the things that I have discovered about the Lord is that He blesses people who aren't worthy of a blessing. Let me ask you, would Jesus heal someone who wasn't worthy of good health? Would He open eyes that one day might lust? Would He loose tongues that one day might curse? Would He heal hands that one day might kill? The answer to all of these questions has to be yes. God's blessing isn't based on who we are, but who He is. Anytime the Lord goes to bless anybody, He has to do two things. He has to overlook their past and He has to overlook their future. He doesn't bless based on whether they deserve it and He doesn't bless based on what they are going to do with it.

The **second reason** why "**Jail House Religion**" is so prevalent is because those who lead these inmates to the Lord rarely count the cost with them. **Proverbs 23:23** says, "**Buy truth, and do not sell it.**" And **Luke 14:28** says, "**For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it?**" Prison ministers are notorious for not taking the time to tell inmates what it's going to cost them to be a Christian. They're so concerned about getting them to make decisions that they don't give them the information they need in order to make good, sound, and strong decisions. The kind of decisions that will weather storms and attacks from the enemy. The kind of decisions that aren't based on what is best for them but

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### C. God is not an idol.

From early times, people worshipped inanimate objects as god. We see Rachel stealing the household idol from her father Laban when she went away with her husband, Jacob (Genesis 31:17-35). The Philistine god, Dagan, is mentioned as an idol in 1 Samuel 5:1-5 and Judges 16:22, 23. God warns against worshipping idols in Exodus 20:4 and Israelites disobeyed with the worship of the golden calf made by Aaron as recorded in Exodus 32:1-20. In the New Testament Demetrius, a silversmith, had a prosperous business selling images he made of the goddess Diana (Acts 19:21-41)

There are other untrue forms of God that people believe such as He may be in an inanimate object. This thought comes from ancestral reincarnation that the spirit of an ancestor appears in an object and is closely related to pantheism where the thinking is that God is in everything.

### D. God is not a Deist.

The deist approach to God teaches that God created the universe yet remains apart from it and does not get involved in its natural matters. From this the deist could deduce there are no miracles or supernatural happenings since God would not interfere. Deism is the idea that God created the universe, and after creation, went on vacation and left the world to run itself. The Deism movement was put forth through the writings of Thomas Paine and David Hume and others and was said to have affected our founding fathers such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and others. It has been debated for centuries how involved those presidents actually were with Deism and I personally feel that liberal teaching has over exaggerated their role in it.

We know the Deism approach does not stand up to the biblical test. God is active in our daily lives as we easily see in verses such as Psalms 32:8, Psalms 48:14, and Psalms 139:10.

### E. Other misconceptions about God

Misconceptions abound even regarding what God is not! Here are two others that deal with the false concepts of God's character.

- The genie in the lamp concept of God is where you rub the lamp and make your wish. Or in another tradition, you rub the Buddha's belly and make a wish. This approach was termed the grocery clerk approach; we tell God what we want, and He is obligated to go to the shelf and pick it off for the petitioner. People have a misconception that God should be a servant of their desires, and this is something that God is not.



- There also is the misconception that God is angry with people all the time and He is ready to pounce on every sin we do. 1 John 1:8, 9 tells us that He forgives us when we confess our sins. There are signs that we may unintentionally forget to ask God's forgiveness for, but for us believers those sins have already been forgiven us through Jesus' death on the Cross.

As we have looked at some of the false conceptions of who God is and what His characteristics are, in future newsletter we will at who the real God really is.



Del Burkholder



# 207 Years of incarcerations Served By Del Burkholder



Pictured L-R

John Lekka - 45 years, James Miller - 45 years, Freddy Nole - 49 years,  
Gerald Everett - 23 years, and Lewis Lee - 45 years

In the DOC in Pennsylvania, it is not unusual for my eyes to drift to the number on the individual's shirt when talking to him and if it starts as an A or B, I can quickly equate the long years of incarceration. I usually have great empathy for his situation, as he has been a stalwart in the Body of Christ for a long time in prison. I rejoice when these former lifers get out and, as you often find, they are model citizens to the communities. Lewis Lee is part of Men of Purpose, a group ministering to freed men. He himself served 45 years, being released in 2020 through the Junior Lifer bill. One of the things Men of Purpose does in conjunction with Yokefellows is occasionally meet former lifers being released that day. I find this picture of 207 combined years of time being free and living for Christ to give hope to the many lifers and long-termers reading this article.

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on what is best for the Lord. The kind of decisions that will cause the inmate to understand that though God has forgiven him of his sin, that he still has to face the consequences of that sin.

The **third and final reason** why "**Jail House Religion**" is so prevalent in our penal system is because most don't know how to discern between Godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. **2 Corinthians 7:10** says that "**Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.**" Worldly sorrow is motivated by preservation of self, but Godly sorrow is motivated by transformation of self. Worldly sorrow wants to get out of something, but Godly sorrow wants something to get in. Worldly sorrow is a result of getting caught, but Godly sorrow is the result of being found. You must not feed worldly sorrow but confront it in hopes that it will turn into Godly sorrow which will bring repentance and life.

## STREAMS of Life

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