

# "GOD, I WOULD NOT DO IT THAT WAY"

## Part 1: "MY WAYS ARE NOT YOUR WAYS"

Among the many spiritual understandings that cause Christians to struggle is the desire to relate to God. The primary purpose of being a Christian is to form a developing, maturing relationship with God. We seek to understand the information and message of the Bible, to understand Jesus Christ, to understand God's concept of the church, and to understand salvation because we desire a developing, maturing relationship with God.

Understanding God is an enormous, never-ending challenge. Commonly the individual Christian bases his or her understanding of God on his or her understanding of humanity. Commonly, we assume many things about God. "If it makes sense to me, it makes sense to God." "If I would do it that way, God would do it that way." By humanizing God, we impose our priorities on God; we impose our values on God; we impose our perspectives on God; and we impose our stances on God.

It is much too easy for us to think of God as if He was a superhuman or the highest expression of "the best" of humanity. We often justify our conclusions about God or His will by emphasizing scriptures that agree with our conclusions and ignoring scriptures that disagree with our conclusions. We too easily conclude that God is far more concerned about our beliefs than our actions. We find it easy to blind ourselves to God's balance between belief and action. We even conclude that we can justify horrible acts if those horrible acts support "good" beliefs.

When we reason in these ways, we duplicate the mistakes of the generations and ages before us.

### **I. Think with me as we conduct an interview with a devout Israelite in the last years of the Old Testament period.**

#### **A. "Do you know God?"**

1. "Of course I know God."
  - a. "I belong to the nation of Israel, and the nation of Israel exists because God formed it."
  - b. "I can trace my ancestors back all the way to Abraham who lived over a thousand years ago."
  - c. "I know which son of Jacob was my forefather."
  - d. "I live by God's law."
  - e. "I know the prophets that God sent to us."
2. "Of course I know God!"

#### **B. "Of the many things I need to understand about God, what one thing would you recommend that I never forget about God."**

1. "You must never forget that God is tough! If you do not do what He says, He will crush you!"

2. "He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's wife."
3. "He killed every firstborn son of the Egyptians."
4. "In the forty years of the exodus, He killed every adult Israelite man who left Egypt with only two exceptions--Joshua and Caleb."
5. "He did not allow Moses to enter Canaan after all Moses endured."
6. "In the period of the Judges, he punished Israel with captivity after captivity."
7. "He withdrew His presence from King Saul, and King Saul and some of his sons were killed by the Philistines."
8. "As close as David was to God, there were times when God punished David."
9. "Solomon was severely punished by God."
10. "God destroyed ten of the twelve tribes of Israel in the Assyrian captivity, and those people never were a nation again."
11. "God placed the kingdom of Judah in Babylonian captivity and caused horrible suffering."
12. "Never, never forget this fact: God is tough!"

## **II. Please take your Bibles and turn to Isaiah 1.**

### **A. Isaiah began his teaching before the kingdom of Judah was captured by the Babylonians and sent into exile.**

1. I want you to notice ways in which chapter one could be used to verify God's "tough guy" image.
2. "My own people do not know me" (verses 2, 3).
  - a. "Farm animals know who their owner is, but my people do not know Me."
  - b. "They exist because of Me, but they neither know nor understand Me."
3. "You are a sinful nation, descendants of evil people, and sons who do wickedness" (verse 4)
  - a. "You abandon me and despise Me."
  - b. "You turn away from Me."
4. "As a nation, you are like a sick body" (verses 5,6).
  - a. "There is not one healthy place on you."
  - b. "You are like a sick person who is cut and raw all over who has received no medical care."
5. "You need to clean yourself up, completely turn your life around, treat people like they ought to be treated, and listen to me" (verses 16-20).
  - a. "If you do that, I will bless you wonderfully."
  - b. "If you do not do that, I will destroy you with the sword."

6. "This is what will happen to you:"
    - a. "Your land will be deserted, and strangers will live on it" (verses 7-9).
    - b. "I will pay zero attention to your worship" (verses 10-15).
  7. "Jerusalem has become a prostitute filled with every kind of corruption (verses 21-23).
    - a. "I will take my own vengeance and turn my hand against you" (verses 24-26).
    - b. "I will crush the transgressors and the sinners" (verse 28).
- B. Judah and the city of Jerusalem refused to hear God's call to repentance, and Babylon destroyed Judah.**
1. The temple was destroyed, reduced to rubble.
  2. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed and its walls pulled down.
  3. The people were forced by the Babylonians into exile for seventy years.
- C. In this [as well as all other acts of God], understanding God's motives is extremely important.**
1. God was not being "mean" to Judah because He enjoys punishing people.
  2. God allowed Judah to endure the complete consequences of their evil because He wanted them to repent.

**III. After Judah finally "understood God's message" in Babylonian captivity, God had the enormous job of making these people understand that He really cared about them. Turn with me to Isaiah 55.**

- A. God had Isaiah to encourage Judah (verses 6, 7).**
1. To encourage them, Isaiah asked them to do two things.
    - a. First, seek God while he can be found (remember in Isaiah 1 God paid no attention to their worship.)
    - b. Second, turn away from wickedness and unrighteous thoughts, and turn to the Lord.
  2. If they did that, Isaiah promised God would do two things.
    - a. God would have compassion on them.
    - b. God would pardon them.
- B. The reaction of many when they heard this is predictable.**
1. "God, have compassion on us? *Pardon* us? God? No way!"
  2. "He did not have compassion on us or pardon us when Jerusalem fell, when the temple was destroyed, when we were forced into exile!"
  3. "He told us it was going to happen! He let it happen! And now we are supposed to think that he extends a compassionate pardon?"

4. "God is tough! The tough God does not deal in compassion that pardons."

**C. Isaiah answered for God in a totally unexpected way (verses 8, 9).**

1. "Do not think that God acts like you act or thinks like you think."
2. "God's thoughts and ways are so far beyond yours that you cannot comprehend them."
3. "God's thinking and actions are so far beyond yours that they are like the heavens being higher than the earth."

**IV. This is the problem people have in trying to understand God: they think God is like them (same use of emotions, same use of reasoning, same use of logic).**

**A. If we could not or would not do something, we think God could not or would not do that.**

1. "If someone upset me so much that I let happen to them what God let happen to Judah in the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity, I would not have compassion or want to pardon their descendants."
2. For us there is a basic inconsistency between punishment and compassion, between consequences and pardon.
  - a. You do not show compassion to people you punish--that is inconsistent!
  - b. You do not pardon someone you make endure the consequences--that is inconsistent!
3. God is not ruled by what we humans declare to be "consistent."
  - a. He can be compassionate toward those He punishes.
  - b. He can pardon those He calls to consequence.
  - c. He not only can; He does.

**B. "But I would not do it that way!"**

1. That was Isaiah's point when he declared for God, "My ways are not your ways."
2. Every single Christian should be deeply grateful that God does not do things the way we would do them.
3. If God did, none of us could be saved.

Thank you, God, for thinking and behaving in ways far beyond anything we can image.  
Thank you, God, for not being confined to our thoughts and our actions.