



OCTOBER 24, 2021 | REV. MINHONG SONG

“Our Missional Living is Based on Who God is” (Deuteronomy 10:17-22)

¹⁷ For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. ¹⁸ He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. ¹⁹ And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. ²⁰ Fear the Lord your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. ²¹ He is the one you praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. ²² Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.

Knowing the character of God is essential to living a fulfilling Christian life. We need to know who God is and what God is like so that we can obey Him better and follow His ways. The problem with the Israelites when they came out of Egypt was that they did not know their God well. There was no personal knowledge of God, let alone intimacy with God.

So, the result was that they treated the LORD their God as one of many gods or even just a concept of a spiritual being. Israel had no relationship with God, and this problem was aptly revealed when Moses left the assembly for forty days to receive the Ten Commandments in mount Sinai.

Here we have Moses fasting and praying before God before the LORD would carve out two stone tablets with the commandments on them. While this was going on, down below at the foot of the mountain what were the Israelites doing? They made the image of a golden calf and worshipped and danced around it, saying ‘this god brought us out of Egypt.’ You can imagine how angry the LORD was, and Moses, too.

Now, Moses is speaking to the new generation of Israelites who are about to enter Canaan. He reminds them of the golden calf incident and tells them that it was not something that happened a long, long time ago. It is not an abstract thing that may or may have happened. He says in Deut. 10:5 that the tablets are right here with him:

Then I came back down the mountain and put the tablets in the ark I had made, as the Lord commanded me, and they are there now.

Moses wants to address to them these questions:

How is it possible that the golden calf incident took place?

What went wrong?

And how could we ensure that this does not happen again in the land of Canaan?



Don't think that this kind of problem is unique to Israel. We, too, face similar issues. When life throws a curveball as in temptations and trials, some of us keep our composure and faith in God. But many of us waver, sometimes all shaken up and far away from God.

Instead of claiming God's help and leading in our lives, we are quick to embrace the comforts and securities that the world has to offer. I pray that God will show us the importance of knowing God's character and imitating Him (Eph. 5:1).

Let us Get to Know God Better

James Packer wrote in his book *Knowing God* that people who know their God exhibit the following:

Those who know God have great energy for God.

Those who know God have great thoughts of God.

Those who know God show great boldness for God.

Those who know God have great contentment in God.

Everything starts with the personal knowledge of God. We need to know who God is and what He is like. We need to discover what kind of things God cares about and God is concerned with.

When Moses went back to the mountain to receive the new set of the tablets, this is what the LORD God said to him:

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." (Exod. 34:6-7)

Why is God saying this to Moses? Isn't this something they have already experienced about God?

The LORD is reminding Moses how little the people of God know who God is. They do not know their God and what He is like. When you do not know God, it is difficult to understand what God's intention is. It goes for any relationship, whether it is with God, with our neighbor, or with our friends: unless we know them well, we will not understand their ways or intentions. The result is misunderstanding and division.

A story about an angry store owner because we took up his parking space at the back
He said that we parked our car in his lot several times before and threatened to tow it
We asked for forgiveness and then later made up the strained relationship
We understood his position better when we talked with him about why



When we get to know the other side in a personal way, we understand better.

Moses is saying the same thing. The people of God need to know their God better. Let us look at vv. 17-18.

For the Lord, your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.

He makes three points about what kind of God the LORD (YHWH) is.

First, He is not just another local deity, but He is God of gods and Lord of lords.

In the ancient near east, all gods were basically local, in charge of specific things. Take, for example, Baal, the god of Canaan. Baal was known as god of thunder and lightning, giving rain and soaking the ground with rain. When the rain comes, Canaanites believed that their god was merciful to them. In drought, they tried to appease their god and asked for rain.

The name 'Baal' means in Semitic language 'master' or 'king.' Canaanites would kneel before the god of Baal and confess our master and king.

But Moses is telling them not to do that. The LORD God (YHWH) and Baal cannot be compared, for they are not in equal footing. Not only is Baal a false god that does not exist, BUT the LORD God is also God of gods, Lord of lords, and is over all things, be it rain, wind, fire, sun, moon, and so forth. In other words, the LORD is the LORD of all, and not limited to a region.

Second, He shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

God is just. He does not quickly judge a person by outward appearance. Instead, God is interested in our hearts and what is inside of us. Are we genuine? Are we sincere? Are we people of integrity?

God accepts no bribe. Whereas humanity is fallen and bends the law, God is not like that. God is a just God and respects fairness.

Look at the horrible situation in Haiti with no relief in sight. One island, two nations (Haiti and Dominican Republic), and yet so different. Why is the country in such chaos? Corruption, bribery, and injustice are at the heart of the problem.

After the great earthquake in 2010, enormous amounts of foreign aids poured into the country. Where are they now? Nothing seems to improve in Haiti.

We need to pray for believers and their churches in Haiti who are trying to hold the society together. We also need to pray for the seventeen Mennonite missionaries and their children who are kidnapped right.

If you look at most developing countries, bribery is common practice.



My experience at the Phnom Pen International Airport

When bribery is rampant, the weak and the disfranchised are short-changed. It is a never-ending vicious cycle. The poor get poorer and the rich get richer. God does not like bribery. God shows no impartiality. He does not like courts marred by bribery.

Third, He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner.

The fatherless and the widow and the foreigner in the time of Moses had one thing in common: they were defenseless. When in trouble, they could not count anyone to come to their side. That is why God defends their cause and feeds the foreigners.

Here we see God's character of mercy. Yes, He is a merciful God. He is both just and merciful. He makes sure that justice and mercy are shown to the weak and powerless. God says to Israelites to remember the foreigners because they, too, were foreigners in Egypt.

God wants His people to be like him and show the qualities He has. To know God's character is to understand God's ways and walk in obedience. That is what God has in mind for Israel: Get to know me intimately and follow my ways.

We need to know God intimately.

Look at the first two kings of Israel: Saul and David. Saul did not know God personally and he would visit mediums when in trouble. But David knew his God intimately and came to God in prayer and praise whenever he was in trouble.

We need to know God intimately. That is what Hosea said:

Let us acknowledge the Lord;

let us press on to acknowledge him.

As surely as the sun rises,

he will appear;

he will come to us like the winter rains,

like the spring rains that water the earth."



For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,

and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hos. 6:3,6)

Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3).

Let us get to know God's character (justice and mercy) and follow Him wholeheartedly. Amen.