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Who is Your God?

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for the little ones that we get to enjoy and it's just an encouragement to see little hearts that are tuned towards you. Father again, we just want to tune our hearts towards you this morning. We want to again come before you and recognize that we have the privilege still of opening up your book, we have the privilege of looking into it and accompanied by your Holy Spirit, gaining new understanding of who you are and what you are doing in our lives. I pray that you would give us that understanding by the power of your Holy Spirit. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

47 years ago I was at the height of my pagan career. I was in college and I had three different roommates, all of whom were fellow pagans, and one was a fellow by the name of Danny O'Brien. Danny O'Brien had one interesting habit; he loved calling in to Christian radio programs and he'd ask one question over and over. In fact, he asked the question of just about anybody that he met. Now mind you, Danny was a pagan. He was a bitter ex-Catholic.

He's somebody who thought the notion of God was quaint, he thought it was funny and understand, he really didn't care what kind of answer you gave him. He just liked asking the question. And the question was: Who is your God? It's an entirely appropriate question for a pagan to ask because understand, I'm not using "pagan" in the pejorative sense, I'm using it in the dictionary sense. The dictionary says a pagan is someone who worships many gods or no god at all. And that was the case with Danny. Like I said, he really didn't care which god you worshiped, he was just extremely curious who is your God.

The question is not so far-fetched. It's the very question that the Philistines asked of the Jews. It's the question that the Jews asked of Moses in the book of Exodus. It's the question that Paul asked of the Greeks in the book of Acts. Who is your God? Well, do you know who your God is? Can you describe him? I mean, is he a humble servant or is he the King of Kings? Is he a gentle shepherd or is he a consuming fire? Is he a loving father or is he a vessel of fury? And does your answer depend on what church you go to, where you live, what age you live in, or who you choose to listen to? Well, the fact is the real God is not any one of these characteristics; he's all of them, from humble servant to vessel of fury. You see, there's one thing that we humans are highly inclined to do that God views as a form of idol worship. It's

taking one of God's characteristics and elevating it to a level that defines him by this one main attribute. You know, if you go back to the commandments, if you go back in particular to the second commandment, you'll find that God has much to say about this type of false worship. In *Exodus 24* he says this, he says: "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*" See, the second commandment forbade using any type of carved image or any type of likeness of anything as an aid in worshiping God. Have you ever wondered why would God forbid that particular thing? Well, it's because the very act of trying to capture one aspect of God's character winds up precluding capturing any of the others. I mean, let's say you use an image that highlights God's strength. It's going to automatically hide his gentleness. I mean if you wanted a visual representation of God's wrath, you could paint an angry God but it would automatically hide his patience. Give a visual presentation of God's love and you're automatically shutting out a presentation of God's justice. Put Jesus on a cross in a crucifix and you're automatically precluding the resurrection. See, the problem is we have this incredible urge to shrink God down to our level to humanize him and to make him manageable. And when we succeed, more often than not we just make a Christianized version of a pagan god, and typically one characteristic will always rise

to overwhelm all of the others. And different times, different places, different customs, different generations, they all emphasize different aspects but all at the cost of others.

Now our generation has chosen to pull the love of God out of context and set it on a pedestal above all the other attributes of God. *1 John 4:16: God is love.* And folks love to paraphrase *1 John 4* and extrapolate that one thought out of it. But scripture says a lot more than just *God is love*. It has much to say about God's holiness and his justice and his perfection. The problem is that God's holiness, justice, and perfection is really no match in our culture for our version of his love. And our version of God's love is not really in the same universe as God's. I mean our generation's version of God's love is more like amplified cosmic niceness than it is genuine love, and Jesus often times becomes much more of a hallmark card than he becomes the God of scripture.

You know, there's no escaping the fact that for many people today, they look at the whole of the Bible and they see the God of the Old Testament as someone who is mean, someone who is short-tempered, someone who is nasty; and they see the God of the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ as this cosmically nice, perfect gentleman who's so incredibly grateful that we're willing to accept him as our personal savior. That's a Christianized version of paganism.

We basically thought up our own God. And no other generation has produced such lofty thoughts about man's place in the cosmos and such lowly thoughts about God's. And the result is often times that the one thing that is absolutely crucial to approaching God which is humility, it's replaced by an arrogance that's so pervasive it's no longer recognizable. The God of the Old Testament can only be seen as mean and nasty by people who think they're almost his equivalent. They are not.

You know, the mouse that I killed last night probably could have thought that I was mean and nasty as well. I mean he invaded my silverware drawer and he left a whole bunch of little calling cards. So I put out a trap and I killed him. I mean my guess is that all the other mice would say about me if they could, boy, he's nasty, he's mean, if you get near him, he's going to kill you. They are correct. I mean, I see the mice in my drawer as vermin, as something unclean, something capable of bringing disease and worse into my home. But here's the point. When it comes to a holy God, we are no different. I mean, we, too, are fallen and unclean and no one can deny that we bring with us death, disease, war, poverty, and misery. And the only difference here is that our holy God is determined to rescue us from that misery. But to do that he first had to instruct us as to who he was. And hence in the Old Testament, we understand that the God of the Old Testament is a

holy God, a God so unlike us that his mere presence would kill us. You know, when God came down to Mt. Sinai to give us the ten commandments, his people reacted like any other people, including you and me, would have reacted. They were absolutely terrified. God's holiness, his absolute other-ness was instantly recognizable as an existential threat. Listen to what God says in *Exodus 20:18*. It says: *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightening and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."* See, those folks who insist on seeing the God of the Old Testament as mean as nasty don't understand that Jesus Christ, the God of the New Testament was the exact same God. I mean, he's *the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, Colossians 1:15* tells us. And that same terrifyingly holy God whose mere presence was deadly left heaven itself and entered into flesh in a barn in Bethlehem and he lived the life of a humble peasant and he lived it spotlessly so that he could take that spotless life to the cross and offer it as a substitute for our lives. You know, when Jesus died, something remarkable took place. It involved this veil that was inside the temple that separated God from his people in that temple in the Old Testament. When Jesus died that veil was torn in two. Understand, that veil was some 30 feet high and people say it was like one inch

thick. Listen to how the scripture describes its being torn in two at the moment of Jesus's death. It says this in *Matthew 27:50*, it says: *And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.*

Now, the reason why God ripped that temple veil in two is because Jesus' sacrifice made that veil no longer necessary. And prior to Jesus laying down his life for payment for our sin, there was only one way that anybody could ever gain access to God, and that was once a year and that was only the high priest. And he would enter into the temple bearing an offering for the sins of the people. And he would go into the presence of a holy God and he would go past that veil, and he would be trembling as the people did at Mt. Sinai, knowing as they did that if he offered up the sacrifice in the wrong spirit and if he offered it up in the wrong way, he would die. I mean, it was a terrifying event requiring a great deal of courage on the part of the representative who bore the blood sacrifice representing the sins of the people before a holy God. You just picture this veil, you have the outer court and you have the holy, then you have the holy of Holies and it's separated, it's separating God from his people. And that curtain stood as a symbol of the wall that divided us from God and that wall was the difference between God's holiness and our sinfulness. And that

wall represented God's perfect justice that could not allow the sinfulness of man and the holiness of God to co-exist or coincide. God and man were separated by sin itself until Christ came, and by paying the price of our sinfulness, he was able to reestablish a righteousness for us that wasn't ours. People refer to it as an alien righteousness because it is. It was his righteousness given to us by faith. See, if I stand before God in my own righteousness, I'm doomed. I'm far from righteous. I'm fallen and I'm sinful just like all of us in this room are. But if by faith I stand before God claiming Christ's righteousness as my own, then God sees me through his Son's righteousness and not my own, and in God's sight, I, like Christ, am perfect. Jesus' death allowed us to come boldly before God's presence knowing that that veil is no longer necessary. But God is still holy.

Our generation's obsession with the love of God at the expense of his holiness has created an entirely different image than that of the high priest satisfying a holy God through the proper execution of a blood sacrifice. I mean, if you want a picture of what the modern version of that is today, I picture a guy strolling into God's presence, kind of slouching into a chair, putting his muddy boots up on the table with a beer in his hand saying, "Hey, God, how the heck are you?" There's still only one way to approach God and that is on our faces. *Humble yourselves before the Lord and he*

will exalt you, James 4:10 says. But the very last thing we teach people about God today is that we need that humility, that understanding that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; and that fools despise wisdom and instruction. Proverbs 1:7. And the "fear" that God's talking about here is an understanding of who he is and who we are in relation to him. For us it means approaching the Bible with reverence and awe, amazed, astounded that God would consent to reveal himself to us. It's recognizing that knowing who our God is isn't a side line, it's not a hobby, it's -- rather, it's supposed to be the consuming passion of our existence. Jesus himself said in John 17: "This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Paul said in Philippians 3:8: Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

So, here's my question for us this morning. It's Danny O'Brien's question: Do you know who your God is? Is he the real God? Is he the God with whom we have to do? Or is it the product of our culture's wishful thinking and imagination, a God made in the image of man? Let's say that my heart is pure and let's say my desire truly is to find the real God. Okay. Now, how do I find him? Well, the answer is really so basic it's easy to miss. You have to

look for him. I mean *Matthew 7:7* says: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." *Proverbs 8* God says: I love those who love me, and those who seek my diligently find me. So we have God's promise that if we seek him, we will find him. But first we have to ask ourselves a very important question, and the question is this: Is it truly God that I'm seeking or is it some blessing I expect to get from God? I mean to borrow from computer parlance, what are your search parameters? Are you searching for God himself or instead are you searching for the peace, the assurance, the contentment that you hope that this god is going to give you? Those are two very different things. I mean, if you're searching for contentment, peace or assurance instead of God alone, well then you're going to define your search by your desires in the very same way that the Israelites did in the desert. See, they had convinced themselves that they were looking for God when in fact what they were looking for was not God but the strength and protection that they thought God would give them. If you remember what happened when Moses went up on the mountain to meet God at Mt. Sinai, he was gone for forty days and forty nights, and the Israelites thought that God's representative had disappeared. So they thought they were stuck and so they said, well, let's just go make another god. This is what *Exodus 32* says: *When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves*

together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

So here's the scene. Picture that in your mind. Moses comes down from the mountain after forty days, he sees what the people are up to, and he is furious. And he confronts Aaron and Aaron begins to hem and haw and he starts making all these different excuses. We have this in *Exodus 32:21*, it says: And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?" And Aaron said, "Let not the anger of my Lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, 'Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this

Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

Is there a lamer excuse in the entire Bible for doing something so outrageous? This has got to be God's attempt at humor. It has to be. *"I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."* Well, the bottom line was the people themselves, they wanted a cow God and Aaron gave them a cow God. And actually that's probably not fair. The golden calf was supposedly designed to represent God's strength and his power because that's what they wanted, that was their search parameter, strength and power. And so we have to ask ourselves if we really are that different. Are we not really just as guilty of violating the second commandment's demand that we not emphasize one part of God at the exclusion of the other parts? Because when we seek a god of peace, we only get a peace god, a god who will supply peace at any price. And the same truncated god emerges when we seek only a love god or a contentment god or a prosperity god, we get a god but not the God. Our seeking defines our finding. And what happens when we're seeking only a god of peace and we discover a scripture that doesn't fit that god, what do we do? Well, we ignore it, we excuse it, we avoid it. And so the question is, do you speak into the scripture or does it speak

into your life? I mean, the scripture is God's unique revelation of himself and God makes no excuses whatsoever for who he is and how he acts because he doesn't need to. He doesn't answer to us and he never will. And if you think the scripture is full of disturbing statements by and about God, it's really not God's problem, it's our problem. And understand, much of our problem, much of our disturbance is culturally conditioned. I mean, do you know that there are people in other cultures who are profoundly disturbed by scriptures in ways that are directly the opposite of our disturbances? I mean, we love to question -- we love to speak about Jesus's words about the woman who was caught in adultery when Jesus says, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." Do you know there are cultures who find that statement of Jesus incredibly offensive? They find it offensive because to them it means what they think is that Jesus cares very little about the sin of adultery. You see, our culture finds adultery highly forgivable. There are other cultures who do not. We find Judas's treachery to be one of the worst sins in all of scripture. There's other cultures that don't. See, the point is the real God and how he really operates is guaranteed to offend you at some level regardless of what culture you're in. And if he doesn't offend you at all at any level whatsoever, then the chances are very good he doesn't offend you because you've made him up.

Much of the problem that we have with the God of scripture stems from our own grossly elevated impression of our own standing before God and our rights as human beings. You know, we say that God is absolutely sovereign, but what does "sovereignty" mean? It means being supreme in power and authority, it means by virtue of rank that certain rights of sovereignty are unquestioned and absolute. You and I exercise unquestioned and absolute sovereignty over a host of creatures and that sovereignty is so absolute and total we never give it a second thought. We do as we please with these creatures. If they get in our way, we destroy them without even thinking. And no one calls us to task because our rank is so far above those creatures it confers on us the absolute right to do as we please. My mouse is a perfect example. Like I said, I got out a mouse trap, I put some peanut butter on it, and I carefully created a space in my silverware drawer, I put in the trap. The next morning there's this beady-eyed lifeless mouse staring up at me wondering why I had taken such drastic measures with his life. The answer is simple. He's a mouse; I'm a human. It gives me some rights. See, he's welcome in my yard, he's welcome around my house but when he ventures into my house and in particular in my silverware drawer in my kitchen, I will kill him and I won't give it a second thought. I mean, from my standpoint it warranted nothing more than me saying in the morning to Janice, "Hey, I got him." But from the mouse's standpoint this is devastating. I

mean, this is incredible, this is arbitrary, this is cruel, this is capricious. I don't think anybody's going to challenge me about my mouse cruelty and my right to execute mice for the crime of trespassing in my house. And the reason why, we all know, is the vast difference between mice and people. That difference confers sovereign rights on people over mice, but the fact is mice are far, far closer to people than we will ever be to God. And if we ever want to discover who the real God is, we have to do it on his terms and not ours.

A few years back I was having a discussion with one of my sons about life itself. It was one of those deep discussions, and I was telling him about his responsibilities before God. And he started getting upset and at one point he said, "Hey, you know, I never asked to be born." And I said to him, I said, "Are you under the impression that I did or that my father did or that his father did?" I said, "Is that what you think?" I said, "What makes you think God is obligated to consult you as to whether or not you want to be created?" I told him, I said, God has the right to make him into whatever he chose, whether he's a person, an animal, a rock, a tree, or a pencil; that's God's choice. I said because he's in charge. You're not in charge. *Romans 9:20* says: *But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not*

*the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use? What God is saying, his created beings are just that, created. I didn't ask to be born because I had and I have no say whatsoever in my creation. I'm sure my son was certainly not alone, I mean, I thought the very same thing myself. But understand, no other creature has that gall. I mean, do you really think that raccoons and fish and lions and worms gripe about not being consulted about their creation? They accept their creaturely status implicitly, but we don't. And we don't because really deep down, we do think we are little gods. And if we ever want to know who our real God really is, we need to remember we are not little gods. We are created beings, the product of an immeasurably superior creator. And he created us and he stated his case very clearly in the Garden of Eden. He told us then that he is the creator and we are the creature. And he also said you will obey me or you will die. This is what he said in Genesis 2:16, it says: *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* We all know what happened. We through our representative Adam decided to defy God and his rules and something amazing happened. We disobeyed and we didn't die. Instead of death which God said we would receive, we received grace. And so for thousands of years we've been the*

beneficiaries of that grace. We not only disobeyed and didn't die, we also lied and coveted and murdered and slandered and cheated and did a whole host of other sins and we also didn't die for those either, but not because we didn't deserve to but because our creator turned out to be incredibly gracious, we received mercy instead of judgment.

Now last time out I spoke about this twist of human character that is so rooted in our fallen ness, it's that subtle notion that grace is now something that we are entitled to, that somehow God is obligated to give to us. I spoke of R.C. Sproul's notion that grace accepted inevitably yields to grace expected, and we've seen it over and over again, you know, you pick six people at random, you send them a hundred dollar bill every month and a little note saying "next month I'll send you another," then after six months, send that person a note saying, "I hope you've enjoyed the money. I'm giving it to somebody else," and see what the reaction is. Will it be gratefulness for the \$600 that they've received or the anger now that you've been giving me this money for six months, I've grown to depend on it and who are you to cut me off like that. Grace accepted yields grace expected. I spoke last time about the government, when it gives money to people it calls it an entitlement program. That's exactly how human nature works. And that's true for the way that we view government, it's true for the

way we view God's grace, it's one or the other, either it's a gift or it's an entitlement. And understanding that difference goes a long way towards defining our understanding of the God who is our God.

There was an incident that took place in the book of Acts that just might reveal to you whether you accept God as he reveals himself in scripture or if you subtly or not so subtly create your own God. If you know anything about the book of Acts, it's the book of the birth of the church. And at first the church was filled with all kinds of people who were drawn in droves due to the miraculous nature of its beginning. This is Acts 4:33, it says this, it says: *And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.* Now the church is growing like wildfire until this one incident takes place. And it's an incident that illustrates my point. So let me read to you the account of it. This is Acts 5:1-11, it says: *But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the Apostles' feet.*

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you told the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much," but Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Most of us know the story of Ananias and Sapphira, I mean, they owned the property, they sold it freely, and they held some of it back and gave the impression that they had given all of it to God's service. They were clearly being deceptive, and for that God killed them on the spot. Now, I can remember many, many years back

the very first time I read that, I thought, well, excuse me, God. Holy mackerel. I mean I was a brand new believer, 23 years old filled with 23 whole years of the world's wisdom. Who did God think he was? I mean, there was no question in my mind that God had grossly overreacted to a simple human foible. I mean, God, since when did a simple lie warrant the death penalty? I had some issues with this God of the Bible and I wasn't alone. And I remember the first time I heard somebody try to teach this passage, I mean, they presented Ananias as some kind of fiend and Sapphira was this demon goddess from hell. What? You know, I think the teacher thought that he had to really build a case for God and against Ananias and Sapphira because otherwise God looks so arbitrary, he looks so capricious. But I think the teacher missed the point completely and in missing it, he missed an opportunity to grow our understanding of God. You see, here's the bottom line. And this is the part that's hard to digest. Ananias and Sapphira deserved the punishment they received. They weren't fiends, they weren't demons either, they were just sinners like you and me. I mean, if I was Ananias or Sapphira, I could have easily responded just as they did. You see, for us it's extraordinarily easy to forget that *it is the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. Lamentations 3.* You see, every single one of us who sins is guilty of cosmic treason. We may not see it this way but when we sin, we wind up shaking our fist at God

daring him to judge us each time we disobey. But we receive so much mercy and grace that we begin to see the grace as an entitlement instead of a mercy. And so we're blown away when we see God doing exactly what he said he would do when he said in the Garden of Eden, if you disobey, you die. I mean, how dare God judge them on the spot. Who does he think he is? I mean at the very least they're entitled to grace, at the very least they're entitled to mercy; are they not? I mean it wasn't so bad a sin after all. Grace accepted has become grace expected. I mean do you see the arrogance here? We are entitled to one thing from God and one thing only, and it's the only thing that we can demand of God and it's not grace, it's not mercy, it's justice. Every one of us has the right to demand of God justice. The problem for us is for us, justice means death. God said in *Ezekiel 18: The soul that sinneth, it shall die*. And he goes on to explain that further in *Romans 3:23: For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*. You want to talk about an offensive, fear-producing scripture that people would just as well consider leaving alone, consider *Romans 3:23*. In those two passages God not only tells us that the soul that sins is going to die but then he also tells us what his standard for sin is: *For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*. Do you hear what God is saying? What he's saying is that any thought, any word or deed that comes short of my glory, it violates my holiness and demands justice. We want to say, "Are you

kidding? You can't be serious, God. Are you saying anything that is less than flawless is sinful? That's ridiculous. That's impossible. That's a standard that no man could ever meet." Why do you think God says *for all have sinned*? See, here's the place where the rubber's not just meeting the road, it's colliding with it. The God of the Bible is not the god we would like to make up. He's not the god we would love to create, not the god who's full of the very same things that we are full of only amplified. The God with whom we have to do is so holy and so different that the mere sight of him would kill you. And far from the idea that God is kidding here, understand that God's holiness is so complete and his justice is so complete and his love is so complete that he left heaven itself, came down to earth as one of us, lived among us perfectly, then allowed himself to be slaughtered in order to pay the price of his own justice and holiness so that we can have our sins removed, paid for by the holy one himself, God in the flesh, Jesus, the Christ.

We say we are not under law, we are under grace. But what do you call grace when it is viewed as a cosmic entitlement? I mean, do we forget that *the wages of sin is death* or are we now convinced that the wages of sin is grace? Paul said in *Romans 6: What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid.* Grace means unmerited favor. How can you ever merit

something that's unmerited? The fact is you can't. I mean it's like demanding mercy. Again, you can demand mercy but you'd be wrong because you can't. It's something you're not entitled to. Yet we think -- at least I thought how dare you not grant Ananias and Sapphira mercy, God? How dare you. You see, as soon as we demand mercy, it becomes something different. Instead of mercy it becomes some kind of a negotiated settlement. And the fact is we don't negotiate, we don't arbitrate with God because we have nothing to bring to the table. We simply obey or we face the consequences. But when those consequences are restrained by the grace of God, understand, it doesn't obligate God in any way to anyone. In *Luke 1:50*, God says: *His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation*, and God insists in *Romans 9:18* that *he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills*.

So the crux of the matter is this, if Ananias and Sapphira didn't get grace, which they clearly didn't, then what did they get? Again, here's where the rubber meets the road. They got justice. How does that grab you? I mean, like I said, you can't demand mercy from anyone. If you do, it's no longer mercy. And we never earn grace because it is by its very nature unmerited. So they're not entitled to mercy or grace, then what are they entitled to? They're entitled to justice. God said *the wages of sin is death*,

and he demanded those wages from Ananias and Sapphira. Now the question is did God have that right? Well, how you answer that question will help you understand the question "Who is your God?" Is he the head bureaucrat of some cosmic welfare program? Is grace an entitlement? Is God obligated to any of us? God owes us nothing. Well, let me amend that. God owes us one thing; he owes us justice. But believe me, we don't want that. As I said before, it's a function of our own arrogance to think as I have, as probably all of you have thought at some point, hey, I didn't ask to be born. I wasn't consulted as to the details of my creation. Well, there's only one man in all of history who ever had that right and he had that right because he was the creator of mankind. And as the creator, he had the right to choose his birth place, his parents, even his looks. He chose a barn as his birth place, he chose peasants as his parents, and the only one in all history who could ever choose his own looks chose to identify with the unlovely. *Isaiah 53*, it says: *For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.* He also chose to be crushed for our iniquities and pierced for our transgressions. He was very God yet very man, the sovereign of the universe, flawless, perfect in holiness yet made sin for you and me. That's what God's grace and that's what God's glory is all about.

And it brings us back to the question: Do you know who your God is? Do you seek him alone or what he represents? Do you speak into the scriptures or do the scriptures speak into your life when it comes to understanding who God really is? Do you consider everything as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ? That's what we're here for. That's why God made us. That's why there is no greater purpose than in answering that question: Who is your God? Jesus said in *John 17:3*: "*And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*" Let's pray.

Father, we do, we want to know you. More than anything, Lord, our life's passion should be to know you better, to understand you deeper, to come to the scriptures saying, Lord, pour into me who you are; not the opposite, let me pour into you what I think I want you to be. Father, give us the ability to humbly come before you on our faces as it were, seeking your presence, seeking your insight, seeking your growth, seeking the power of your Holy Spirit, and give us the ability not just to keep it to ourselves but to share it with a world that desperately needs it. I pray this in Jesus' name.