

Knowing God #5

by: Ronald L. Dart

So it is possible for a man to know God. In fact, it's even possible for a man to understand God. We have God's own word for that. And when you think about it, we really know quite a lot about God. The problem is that when you have a limited amount of time to tell someone about God, what are the important things you would want to tell him?

God is the Creator

For a person who knows nothing about God or the Bible, I would be hard-pressed to start anywhere except with a simple concept of God as Creator. What's interesting is that this is precisely the place where the founding fathers of our country started when they laid out the case for our independence. They said, "We do hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." So, in their eyes, the very guarantor of our most fundamental rights is, according to the founding fathers, the Creator. All men were created, all men were created equal, and our Creator said, "By the nature of man, he has certain rights, among them the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Now the reason why I think this is important was also outlined by the apostle Paul in the introduction to his epistle to the people in Rome. In chapter 1 verse 16, of Romans, he said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, yes, and also to the Greek, {17} For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written, the just shall live by faith." He goes on to say, having made this point about the just living by faith, he says, {18} "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, {19} because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has showed it to them."

Now let me pause just a moment to make this clear. Paul is talking about those people, Gentile philosophers, who deny God. He is saying that in the process of denying God, in the process of standing up and saying "There is no God or God is this, or God is that," he says, "They are suppressing the truth, {19} Because that which may be known about God is plain. God has shown it to him." Now the natural question is, How did he do that? What do you mean? Paul answers, {20} "For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."

Paul says clearly, "It is from the creation of the world that the invisible things about God are made visible. They are understood by all the things that are made, his eternal power and

Godhead, so they are without excuse." They are without excuse because out of the simple awareness that there is a creator of all things, many conclusions become inescapable.

The founding fathers, concluded some very important things in the concept of God as Creator, they saw logically the same thing Paul did, that the creation is a self evident fact. They said, "We consider these truths to be self evident," that basically means, self-evident needs no proof. It is there and it is in itself evidence.

"I don't have to prove that God exists. I simply am,," as René Descartes famously said, "I think, therefore I am," until someone came by one day and said "René, would you like a cup of tea," and René said, "Oh, I think not," and she promptly disappeared."

Creation Requires a Purpose

The simple fact of God as Creator has far-reaching implications. Creation, on the face of it, requires a purpose. I mean, why would God make all of this that we see around us if He had no purpose, if He wasn't going somewhere with it? If it didn't mean something?

Well, someone writing in the Psalms, so many years ago, no one knows exactly when, addressed this very problem in the eighth Psalm and it's found in the Bible. He said, "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. {2} Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have ordained strength because of your enemies, that you might still the enemy and the avenger." It is in the mouth of children. Hold a baby in your arms, the psalmist said, and look at this child. It stills the mouths of those who deny the excellence of God.

Then he goes on to say, {3} "When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained; {4} What is man that you are mindful of him? Who cares about man, what's the son of man that you visit him?" And I could say, "Oh Amen to that." When you go out on the dark night and look up into the starlit sky and you sit and think very long about what it is you're seeing up there, man does seem to be insignificant,

But, the psalmist said, "No. I can look at the stars and man can become insignificant, but I still have to hold in my arms, this little baby, and I have to consider what I'm holding." He said, {5} "You have made man a little lower than the angels, you have crowned man with glory and with honor, {6} You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands, you put everything under the feet of man, {7} All sheep and oxen, all the beasts of the field, {8} All the fowls of the air, the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the same, {9} O LORD our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth!"

God, Man and the Universe

And of all the things I know about God, the one thing that captures my imagination more than any other, is the relationship between God, man and the universe. What indeed is man? What does the universe have to do with man? There was a time when I could go out on a dark night and see a sky full of stars and marvel at the beauty. I was brought up on a farm in the hills of Northwest Arkansas and there wasn't much light pollution up there, and on a clear night, the sky was a thing to behold.

Now there is so much light around, you can't get a good look at the night sky, but now there's something else as well. We know things about the universe that we didn't know before. From where we sit on our beautiful blue marble, circling our yellow sun, we seem to be at the very center of the universe, because as we look out into the universe, there is a horizon in every direction and that horizon is at the same distance. We can see so far out and beyond that is nothing and it is the same no matter which way you look. Spread evenly and randomly on a grand scale, we see stars and galaxies almost all of the way to the horizon, but as we see closer and closer to the horizon, we see only quasars and then we see nothing.

Why is it that we don't see anything beyond a certain point in the universe? Is there an edge out there? Is there an end to it all and what does it all have to do with man?

It is a Long Way Out There

So here we are lying on our backs in the grass staring up in the night sky, with stars everywhere, millions, no, billions of stars everywhere. We can only see so far with the naked eye. The further things are out there we have to have a telescope, maybe the Hubble telescope, or even radio telescope to tell us what they are and we know, that way out there, somewhere, is the furthest known objects in the universe. How far is it out there? Well it's a long way.

They tell us that the light from one object to another travels at 186,000 miles per second. The distance then that light would travel in a year is 186,000 miles times 60 times 60 again times 24, to get it up to a day, times 365 for a year. That works out to be nearly 6 trillion miles that light travels in a year. That is a six with 12 zeros after it (6,000,000,000,000).

So you can figure that an object one light year away from us is a long way off. Light traveling at 186,000 miles per second takes a full year to get here from something that was one light year away and after our sun, the nearest star is a cluster of three stars called Alpha Centauri and its four light years away.

If it blew up today and went out today, we wouldn't know it for four years.

The next closest object is Barnard's Star and it is six light years away. Everything in space is a long way from everything else. Barnard's star, the second closest one to us is two light years away from the closest one to it.

You know you could walk out at night at certain times of the year and see the Milky Way. That's our galaxy. That's a collection of hundreds of billions of stars. Our galaxy is 100,000 light years across. You know, numbers like that, sort of go right over our heads, in one ear and out the other. We really can't cope with them, they're just too big.

Those quasars, that we see out on the horizon of the universe, remember, in our galaxy it takes 100,000 years for light to cross our galaxy at the speed of light. Those quasars, that we see out at the horizon of the universe, they tell us these may be 15,000 million light-years away. That's 15 billion light years.

How Old is the Universe?

Now here's the tricky element in all of this, they tell us the universe is 15 billion years or so old, so we are looking out there and seeing what the universe looked like, shortly after 15 billion years ago. It's very young what we are seeing, but here's the problem. The universe, they tell us, looks exactly the same no matter where you are, so that means that out there on the edge of the universe, where those quasars are, things are not now as they appear to be, they are actually out there now just like they are right here.

And someone out there, if there is someone out there, could not see what our part of the universe is like today, they would be seeing it as it was 15 billion years ago, and in looking at us, they would think they see the edge of the universe. The horizon, the quasar. The furthest thing in the universe from them, and to them there is nothing beyond us, just like as we look at those quasars, there is nothing beyond them. Someone looking back at us from out there, they too, would think that they are at the center of the universe.

Now this sounds confusing, it's because we are literally looking back in time. We can only see objects out there as the light comes here. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second and the light that is coming to us from the outer edges of the universe is coming here at the end of the 15 billion mile journey. Therefore, what we see is very very old.

'Big Bang'

Now why is it that we only see objects in the universe out there some 15 billion light years? Why don't we see a little further, the answer is because 16 billion years ago there was nothing out there. There was nothing here. There was nothing anywhere. One moment there was nothing, the next moment there was a rapidly expanding universe, growing out of what they call the 'Big Bang' and those objects out there on the edge of the universe are traveling away from us at something like 90% of the speed of light.

Of course, the truth is, we really don't know how big the universe is and we really don't know how old it is. The estimates of science vary from somewhere around 10 to 11 billion years up to 15 billion years, and maybe there's some who thinks it's older than that, give or take 1 billion years.

But what we do know is, the universe had a beginning and we can look out into space and see the evidence of that beginning, in fact they tell us that the radio telescopes can actually see the background glow of the 'Big Bang' itself.

Traveling at the Speed of Light

Now why am I telling you all this? I am telling you all this so we can come to understand that the universe is incomprehensibly huge and even though it is populated with heavenly bodies in their millions and billions, space is so great, so huge, that astral bodies are separated by distances that boggle our minds. Even the closest of them, distances effectively quarantine them from one another. After all, we can't travel at the speed of light, even at half the speed of light, it would take eight years to reach the nearest star and 12 years to reach the nearest one that might have a planet at half the speed of light. This is why those UFOs that people talk about are not spacecraft from another galaxy, or even from elsewhere in our own, because nothing physical, nothing with mass can even begin to approach the speed of light.

Star Trek

You know, Star Trek is a lot of fun and all the science fiction movies are bags of fun, but you have to consider reality, the fuel to accelerate a spaceship to one half the speed of light would amount to 80 times the weight of the ship itself. It would take the same amount of fuel to slow it down once it got wherever it was going. To accelerate to half the speed of light would take a lot of time. It would take 2-1/2 months to accelerate from a standing start to half the speed of light, while carrying three Gs, as they say, all the way. Now can you imagine your body weighing three times what it does right now, for 2-1/2 to 3 months?

You could not manage it. You couldn't survive that kind of a journey which means that the acceleration and deceleration time would be quite long for getting up toward half of light speed, and that if we could travel close to the speed of light, even if we get on up close to the speed of light, we might be able to travel halfway across our galaxy in say 10 years, but 25 years would have passed at home on earth.

The truth is, we are quarantined by space and by time from any other worlds or civilizations or people that might be out there and they might be out there in their millions, perhaps billions because the size of the universe has plenty of room for them all, with no one even knowing the others existed.

Some 15 billion or so years ago there was nothing here of this universe, nothing at all. It takes a poet sometimes to describe things so we can really grasp them. James Weldon Johnson, many years ago, wrote 'The Creation' and he started by saying, "And God stepped out on space and He looked around and said, "I'm lonely. I'll make me a world," and as far as the eye of God could see, darkness covered everything. Blacker than 100 midnights down in a cypress swamp. Then God smiled, and the light broke." And you know, the truth is, it may have been just that simple.

What is Man?

And that brings me back to the question, given the universe, given its scope, given everything we see out there in the things that we know about it, what is man after all?

We don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews for sure. Traditionally, people thought it was the apostle Paul. Scholars have questioned that. Nobody questions that it's a first century document written by a man who certainly is the foremost theologian of the New Testament Church in that era.

He starts out the book of Hebrews by saying this, "God, at various times and in various manners spoke in time passed to our fathers by the prophets, {2} But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." Plural. By the Son of God, He made the worlds and so consequently when you lie on the ground on your back in the grass outside at night and look up at all the stars that are up there, you realize that he says, "God made all that by his Son, {3} That the Son being the brightness of his glory, the express image of God's person, upholding everything by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

This One, the writer of Hebrews tells us, was far greater than any angel. The angels are not even in the ballpark with this individual. The writer of Hebrews says later, {10} "You, Lord, in the beginning have laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands. {11} They will perish, but you will remain."

Now that's a hard thing to get your mind around. When you understand that these things have been going on for 15 billion years and are going to go on for some time yet, but you have to realize, if we can put a series of numbers in front of the age of the universe, we have declared it to be finite. In fact, when you consider eternity, 15 billion years is just a hiccup in time and they tell us it's just a question of whether or not the universe will collapse back in upon itself, or whether it will continue to expand and just burnout, but it will not continue, it will perish.

The Scripture says that God will remain. {11} "They will all wax old like a garment {12} And like a vesture (robe) you will fold them up and they all will be changed, but you are the same, and your years shall not fail." You can't help but wonder, if maybe the writer of Hebrews has given us the answer to the way the universe will end, not that it just expands and expands and finally burns out but that it is folded up and it will change into something totally different, which the Bible seems to tell us will happen.

To which {13} "of the Angels did he say at anytime, "Sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool?" Obviously none of them. {14} "They are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them, who will be the heirs (plural) of salvation." Who is that? He then says, {2:1} "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things we

have heard, lest at any time, we let them get away from us. {2} For if the words spoken by angels was steadfast, {3} How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and has since been confirmed to us by them that heard him. {4} God also bore them witness with signs and wonders in various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will."

Here comes the kicker, here comes the clue, {5} "To the Angels, he has not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak." He is basically saying there is another world out there, that we don't see yet, and the angels are not going to be the ones that the world is put in subjection to. Well, who then?

Verse 6, "But one in a certain place testified, saying, "What is man, that you are mindful of him? Or the Son of Man and that you visit him?" Now we are back to the Psalm again, "What is man?" When you stand out there at night and you look up into the heavens, and you asked the question, {7} "What is man, you made him a little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor, and you set man over the work of your hands, {8} You have put all things in subjection under his feet, everything. For in that he put all in subjection under man, he left nothing that is not yet put under him."

Now, hold it. We are sitting out here in the backyard at night, looking up at the stars in the sky, remember! And it says, "There is nothing that God does not intend to put under man. "Now we see not yet all things put under him." And that's the truth. We look up at that night sky. We consider the distances involved and we say, "No, there's no way that we can go out there and dominate or have dominion over the universe," but we do see this, {9} "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death. We see him crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God, He should taste death for every man. {10} For it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering."

The Universe is Ultimately to be in Subjection to Man

Now, I don't know if you realize what we just read, but what he is saying is, that the entirety of the universe is ultimately to be in subjection to man, and that man is being brought into glory as a son of God with all that entails.

Continuing in Hebrews 1 and verse 11, "For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all one for which cause he is not ashamed to call them, brethren."

So, if I had a limited amount of time to tell someone about God, these are some of the things that I would want to tell him, that God created the universe. He is the creator. He is the creator of man, and He created man for a purpose and that purpose transcends even the greatest and highest imagination of man. These things reveal the greatness of God. They reveal His power, His character, His purpose.

One of the greatest of the Psalms says it all, it's Psalms 148, "Praise you the LORD. Praise you the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights. {2} Praise him all his angels, praise him, all his hosts. {3} Praise him sun and moon, praise him, all you stars of light. {4} Praise him, you heaven of the heavens, and the waters that be above the heavens. {5} Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded, and they came into being. {6} He has established them forever and ever, He has made a decree which shall not pass, {7} Praise the LORD from the earth, you dragons and all deeps. {8} Fire and hail, snow and vapors, stormy wind fulfilling his word, {9} Mountains and hills, fruitful trees and cedars, {10} Beasts, all cattle, and creeping things, and flying fowl. {11} Kings of the earth, all people, princes, and judges, {12} Young men and maidens, old men and children, {13} Let them praise the name of the LORD for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and the heaven."

So it gives new meaning doesn't it to what I always say, you were Born to Win!

This article was transcribed with minor editing from a message given by
Ronald L. Dart titled: Knowing God #5 (KG5) 11/20/01
Transcribed by: bb 7/7/13

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