

WHEN THE OMNIPRESENT GOD WAS ABSENT

God is everywhere. He is in heaven and on earth. He is on His throne (Matthew 5:34) and upon His footstool (Acts 7:49). He is at the North Pole and the South Pole, and all the way around the equator. He is at the top of Everest and the bottom of the Marianas Trench. He roams the Serengeti plains, meanders up the Shenandoah Valley, and traverses the icy crevices of the Himalayas. He walks in Red Square, and Times Square. He is on the outback and the Sahara and the crowded streets of London and Bangladesh.

Since God is everywhere, "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). Thus, He is at the hip-hop concert, in the licentious teenager's backseat, and at the rave party. He's in Vegas, Reno, and Atlantic City. He is in the alley where the drug deal goes down, at the bar where the alcoholic gets drunk, and on the street corner where the prostitute meets her john. He is in the greedy corporate boardroom, the sleazy strip club, and the hygienic abortion clinic. He attends every session of Congress and every hearing of the Supreme Court. He resides at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. He is aboard Air Force One when it takes off and lands. He was in the Twin Towers on 9/11. *But there was one place where God was not.*

The Omnipresent God was Absent from Calvary (Matthew 27:46).

A thousand years before the crucifixion, the psalmist recorded the prayer that Jesus would pitifully cry from Golgotha's darkened hillside that Passover afternoon: "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" Or in English, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" Jesus was abandoned even by God, which was a new experience for Him. David continues his prehistory of the Savior's thoughts: "*Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?...Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help...But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me*" (Psalm 22:1,11,19). For the first time in all eternity, the Father and Son were separated. God wasn't there.

It was prophesied that the sun and moon would be darkened (Joel 3:15-16) and from noon until three o'clock that afternoon, it happened. It was dark over all the land, a supernatural darkness that could not be explained. It was not an eclipse because Passover was always held at full moon, when there could be no eclipse of the sun. It is reported that Dionysius, at Heliopolis in Egypt, took note of the darkness, and said that "either the God of nature is suffering, or the machine of the world is tumbling into ruin." God sent three days of darkness to the land of Egypt before the first Passover (Exodus 10:21-22), when the lambs were slain to protect the first born; God sent three hours of darkness at the last Passover before the Lamb of God died for the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29).

Why was the omnipresent God absent? Doubtless it is impossible to fathom the mind of God during these hours (cf. Romans 11:34; I Corinthians 2:16), but perhaps these reasons were involved.

The holiness of God was repulsed by the world's sin. Matthew Henry calls this darkness "the frowns of heaven." Why would God abandon His Son at His hour of greatest need, especially when Jesus was doing His Father's will? God still loved Him, but since He bore the world's sin, God's holiness was repelled. "*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*" (Habakkuk 1:13). God's holiness may be His chief attribute. It is referred to more times in Scripture than any other trait. "Holiness is the central nature of the being of God from which such attributes as love, justice, and mercy emanate."

In both the Old and New Testaments, we read of the inhabitants of heaven praising

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

Him with the words, “Holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). God’s book reflects God’s holiness. Truly, “*Who is like unto thee, O Lord among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?*” (Exodus 15:11). The word *holy* is found 611 times in the Bible and *holiness*, 42 times. *Saint* (100 times, including plural), *sanctify* (132 times past tense), and *sanctification* (5 times) all come from the same root as *holiness*. The darkness manifested God’s holiness as hatred of the sin that Jesus experienced in that dreaded hour.

The justice of God inflicted upon Jesus the penalty that the worst of all sinners would face. Just what was taking place there that afternoon? The soldiers saw a routine execution, the Jewish leaders saw an enemy disposed of, the Romans saw a problem resolved, the disciples saw their dreams come to an abrupt halt, the women saw their friend killed, and Satan thought he saw God’s plan foiled; but God and the angels saw something else. God’s great dilemma—how He could be both just and Justifier—was solved.

Paul reasoned that God sent Christ, “*to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*” (Romans 3:25-26).

- He who knew no sin was made sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21).
- He whom God loved was made a curse for us (Galatians 3:13).
- He who deserved no penalty was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:5).
- He who was worthy of worship “*was delivered up because of our transgressions*” (Romans 4:25).
- He who was Life “*died for our sins according to the Scriptures*” (I Corinthians 15:3; I Peter 3:18), and became “*the propitiation for our sins*” (I John 4:10).

The love of God was offended by the treachery, inhuman cruelty, and indescribable suffering of the object of His affection. It is hard for us to imagine the pain God must have felt as a Father watching His Son endure such abuses as scourging and crucifixion. Many parents have had to leave the room when their child underwent a spinal tap or some other painful medical procedure. They could not bear to watch; they could not endure the screams; they could not abide the tears. But they knew it was necessary for the child to regain his health; it was for the child’s good. When God endured the events from Gethsemane to Gabbatha to Golgotha, it was doing His Child no good. It benefited only other people’s children—even those who were at the time His enemies (Romans 5:8-10).

The truth of God needed the scapegoat to go into the wilderness, bearing the sins of the people. God is meticulous in fulfilling prophecy, even types and antitypes. He had prefigured ridding mankind of sin in a curious ritual engaged in by His people for more than a thousand years. In the Old Testament ceremony, two goats were selected. One was chosen by lot to be offered as a sacrifice. The other became the scapegoat. This animal had the priest’s hands laid upon it while the people’s sins were confessed. The meaning of the ritual was that these sins were passing from the people to the priest to the goat. Then the goat was led by a “fit man” into the wilderness and abandoned—thus the people’s sins were removed from them and left in a place they would never be found again (Leviticus 16:10,21-22). Jesus is the only man who ever lived who knew what it felt like to be that scapegoat. In fact, He uttered the bitter cry of an abandoned scapegoat that afternoon when He “*bore our sins in His body on the cross*” (I Peter 2:24). The separation of darkness was the equivalent of the goat being abandoned in the wilderness.

The goodness of God required separation from the sinner. Jesus took the place of sinners, so He experienced the separation that sinners face (Isaiah 59:1-2). He was separated from God for three hours so that we might be with God for eternity. He endured “the silent treatment” that we might have to face the sentence “depart from me” (Matthew 25:41) and be separated from God forevermore (the second death, Revelation 20:14; 21:8).

-Allen Webster

A Merry Heart Doeth Well...

A little boy was asked to say the prayer before dinner. He thanked God for each of his friends, naming them one by one. He then thanked God for each family member, from his parents to his brothers and sisters, his grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Then he gave thanks for the ham, the mashed potatoes, the corn, the green beans, the salad, the bread, the butter, the pickles, and even the salt and pepper. Then came a long pause, and everyone waited and waited. Finally, the little fellow looked up at his mother and asked, “If I thank God for the broccoli, won’t He know that I’m lying?”

DANGERS TO MY MARRIAGE

Marriage is designed by God to be the most intimate and fulfilling of human relationships. Man was created for woman and woman was created for man. This union glows with the fingerprints of God's care and concern for our happiness. When we follow the blueprint for marriage we are able to reach the pinnacle of God's design for the best of life upon this earth.

If God planned for marriage to be good and bless our lives, then surely Satan in his evil desires would provide temptations to harm and destroy this companionship. Satan is cunning (Genesis 3:1) and crafty in planting minefields for marriage. We must be on guard or we will fall prey to temptation (I Corinthians 10:12).

Some dangers to marriage are very obvious. Adultery would be a very recognizable danger to a marriage and the only fault in marriage that could provide for the termination of that marriage with the right to marry another (Matthew 19:9). Divorce is not required in the case of adultery and many Christians have been able to work past this grievous sin with forgiveness and renewed commitment and dedication to each other.

Sinful habits and addictions can be obvious danger points to a marriage. Alcohol, drugs, and tobacco have caused immeasurable damage to many marriages. The destruction of the physical body (I Corinthians 6:19-20) as well as harm to the mind often place a severe strain on a marriage. Addictions to hobbies or even work can do damage to the union of a man and a woman.

There are other dangers to a marriage that may not be as noticeable or as recognized. These dangers can be very real and very detrimental. Divided loyalty can be a real danger to marriage. When a child of God is married to a child of the devil it is unwise to expect that marriage to reach its potential. With two masters (Matthew 12:30) that are fierce enemies it is no wonder that their servants may have problems with compatibility. Only one thing can be first in life. Trouble is sure to arrive when that one thing is different for the husband and the wife. It is then no wonder that we highly encourage our children to marry someone with a like precious faith (Amos 3:3).

A failure to provide sincere and regular honor plants seeds of frustration and aggravation in a marriage. Romans 12:10 includes our spouse as well as others in reference to affection and honor. Honor needs to be done regularly to have the desired affect. Honor needs to occur privately and publicly. It sometimes happens that compliments and honor happen less after the marriage ceremony than in the courtship. This ought not to be.

Care should be given in being critical of our mate in the presence of others. This may happen in a light hearted manner but may be more hurtful than we realize. While we know our mate better than anyone, extreme caution should be used in sharing their shortcomings when we are around other people (Matthew 7:12). Thou we may not mean any harm by what we say; the fact that our intent is not bad will not change the pain and/or damage to our spouse.

Romance and courtship should continue after the marriage ceremony. One of the dangers to marriage is the cessation of romance and courtship after the vows are exchanged. Song of Solomon is a beautiful dialogue of how a man and his wife are to feel about and act toward each other. Sadly this book has been largely neglected in our teachings. Marriage avoids danger when romance and courtship are pursued regularly.

Money often provides a danger to a marriage. Those who have done much research on the family reveal that money problems often top the list of things that strain a marriage. Good stewardship (Luke 12:42) is a command of the Master and a blessing to the marriage. Deciding what to buy, how much to save, and how much to give to the church are just a few of the decisions that husband and wife must make.

Satan knows that one of the greatest enemies of marriage is selfishness. When we exchange vows we make a commitment for two to become one (Genesis 2:24). There is no room in that oneness for a selfish spirit that is not inclusive of the well being of the new union. The words of Philippians 2:4 have a broader application but certainly apply to the marriage communion as we are instructed not to merely look out for our own interests but for the well being of others. No marriage can be strong if either or both parties are self-centered.

Dangers to marriage can come in a form as innocent as the backgrounds from which we come. No two people were raised exactly alike or in exactly the same environment. Even in Christian homes there are differences in customs and traditions. When do we open Christmas presents? When do we get together for Thanksgiving? These and other things have to be worked out with at least two families and often compromise is necessary.

Satan has made sure there are many dangers to marriage. He wants to weaken and destroy what God intended to be strong and fulfilling. God has provided warning and an escape route for every danger. May we always seek to avoid and overcome dangers that our marriages may be all that they can be.

-Dale Hubbert