

## Key Principles of Christian Living

### 1. *He's God and We're Not!*

Welcome to this new teaching series where we will explore together what I believe to be some key principles of Christian living. Each week we will look at a foundational statement or truth about living as a believer today and then unpack that through the Bible and apply it to our lives.

I am hoping to explore at least ten key principles and I can assure you that all of them will begin and end with God. That should be no surprise because the Bible is all about God, and as the Westminster Shorter Catechism reminds us, *"The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."*

We were made by God and for God. We were made to know God, to serve God, to love God, and to live forever with God. At some point, every human being must cry out with Saint Augustine and say, *"Our hearts are restless until they find rest in You."* We were made to glorify God, and in the act of bringing glory to God, we will enjoy Him forever. And in enjoying God, we will enjoy (in the truest and deepest sense) the life He has given us.

So, what is the first and most basic principle of the Christian life? It all starts with one fundamental truth: **He's God and we're not.** Nothing is more basic than that, but I have lost count of the number of times in my spiritual life when I've have really needed reminding of this key principle because it's so easy to slip into a mindset which negates this foundational truth. All spiritual reality begins with this truth, and if we skip, ignore or downplay this first principle nothing else we encounter in this teaching series will make much sense.

In order to help us grasp this foundational principle of the Christian life, I want to look at a number of Bible passages. This key principle is so fundamental that I could easily find a hundred passages to support it, but I'll share just a few.

**Job 23:13** *"But He stands alone, and who can oppose Him? He does whatever He pleases."*

Job understands that he cannot demand anything from the Lord. In and of himself, he has no power to change his awful condition and he can't even demand a hearing to plead his case with the Lord. God does what God wants, and Job is powerless to oppose Him. Job understands and accepts this reality.

**Job 42:2** *"I know that You can do all things; no plan of Yours can be thwarted."*

This verse introduces the final chapter of Job's saga. It comes after God has given him a theology lesson and a final exam on creation, which Job flunked miserably. Now thoroughly humbled, he confesses that God is all-powerful, He does what He wants, and no one stands against Him. This confession leads him to deep repentance for his foolish questioning of God's plan.

**Psalm 135:6** *"The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths."*

The psalmist goes on to list various proofs that God does what He wants and then the conclusion of the psalm is a five-fold call for everyone to praise the Lord (vv. 19-21).

**Daniel 2:20-22** *“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are His. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with Him.”*

When King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a dream, he could not remember and did not understand, so he asked Daniel to help him. Daniel agreed, prayed to God, and the dream and its interpretation were revealed to him. These words are part of Daniel’s response of praise to God. I am struck by the phrase, *“He knows what lies in darkness.”* He even sees the hidden things because the darkness is not darkness to God. Let’s run the story forward to Daniel chapter 4. When King Nebuchadnezzar takes credit for the greatness of his kingdom, God struck him with a kind of insanity that made him think he was a beast of the field. For seven years he lived among the wild animals. When he finally turned his heart to the Lord, his sanity was restored. This is part of his public confession to God:

**Daniel 4:34-35, 37** *“Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified Him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: ‘What have you done?’ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything He does is right and all His ways are just. And those who walk in pride He is able to humble.”*

Here is a pagan king who re-discovered the truth of God’s sovereignty the hard way. To his credit, he does not hesitate to speak that truth once his sanity is restored. God does whatever He wants. Even the greatest human rulers are as nothing to Him. No one can question what God does. Everything God does is right, and the Lord knows how to humble the proud. It would be hard to find a clearer statement of this first principle in the entire Bible.

**Romans 11:33-36** *“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?’ ‘Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?’ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.”*

This wonderful doxology comes at the end of Paul’s presentation of the gospel as God’s answer to man’s sin, and his presentation of God’s future plans for His people. No one could have foreseen how God would respond to human rebellion. No one gives God advice. No one can trace His path across the starry skies. God is never in debt to anyone for any reason. Everything is from Him, everything is through Him, and everything is to Him. And He alone gets the glory.

One of the sections of the Westminster Confession of Faith says that God ordains *“whatsoever comes to pass.”* So that means that everything in the universe is either caused by God or allowed by God. Nothing ever ‘just happens’ and nothing is caused by someone or something outside of God’s control. Some things He directly causes; other things He allows to happen. But all things in heaven and on the earth and even the things that happen in hell, even the very acts of Satan, are controlled by God.

**Revelation 19:6-7** *“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory!’”*

When Christ returns to the earth, the whole world will clearly know what we know right now by faith: **Our God reigns.** He reigns over all things. He reigns in every situation. He reigns in the very best circumstances of life and in the very worst. He reigns over His friends and even over His enemies.

He reigns in heaven and He also reigns in hell. He reigns over those who doubt Him and deny Him. He reigns over those who follow other gods and other religions. Our God reigns. The world does not yet see it, and sometimes we have trouble believing it because we don't always see it either. But the truth remains and will not be changed: Our God reigns.

As I stand back and consider all these marvelous verses, one fact jumps out at me and will not be ignored. Every time the Bible writers speak of God's sovereignty, it always leads them to praise.

He does what He pleases ... *praise the Lord.*

No one can oppose Him ... *shout for joy to the Lord.*

Everything God does is right ... *Hallelujah.*

How unsearchable is His wisdom ... *to God be the glory forever.*

His plan is working out perfectly ... *praise be to God.*

Our God reigns ... *let the people rejoice and be glad.*

If this truth does not fill our hearts with praise, then we either don't understand what the Bible says, or we simply refuse to believe it. But the truth remains whether we believe it or not. God is in charge of all things. Even when it looks like God is not ruling, He's ruling. When chaos appears, He's in charge of the chaos. When things start falling apart, He's even in charge of the falling apart.

Theologians call this doctrine the '*The Sovereignty of God.*' You find it on every page of the Bible. The word 'sovereign' means king or ruler. God's sovereignty means that He is always calling the shots in the universe. He is in charge of all things.

**Psalm 24:1** *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."*

And that's what I mean by the statement: "*He's God and we're not.*" He is the Creator, and we are His creatures. This is truly the most fundamental principle of spiritual life. Until you understand this, and submit yourself to it, nothing in life will work. So many of our struggles in life come from forgetting who's God and who's not.

At this point I want to talk about God's freedom. Although we talk a great deal about freedom, it's usually our personal freedom in view. We rarely think about God's freedom, yet that is the major point of the Bible passages I just read. The bottom line is this: God's freedom is the only true freedom in the entire universe. Every other 'freedom' is a derivative from His freedom in one way or another. Here are seven short statements that flesh out what I mean by God's freedom:

1. *God is absolutely free to do whatever He wants to do.*

Because God is God, He can do whatever He wants to do, whenever He wants to do it. If He wants to create a planet, or a galaxy, or even another universe, He just says the word and it happens. He is truly 'free' in the absolute sense of the term. This is why He announced Himself to Moses as "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). God is eternal, self-existent, and entirely self-sufficient. He exists entirely apart from the universe He created.

2. *God has the right to deal with us any way He chooses.*

By this I mean that God was under no obligation to create you or me or anyone else. He is also under no obligation to keep any of us alive for even one more second. He is under no compulsion to save a single member of the human race. No one has a claim on God. He can do what He wants with any of us, and no one can ever second-guess Him.

*3. God doesn't have to treat me the way He treats somebody else.*

Many people struggle with this concept because they think that because God did something for a friend or a neighbour or a loved one, then God must be bound to do the same thing for them. But it doesn't work that way. God may deliver you from cancer and your best friend may die of cancer. Envyng your neighbour because he has something you don't have is a waste of time because God always treats us as individuals, not as groups.

The truth is, He might do for you exactly what He's done for someone else. He might do more, or He might do less. He might do something entirely different. He is God. He can deal with us the way He chooses.

*4. God doesn't have to treat me today the way He treated me yesterday.*

This principle needs to be stated carefully. Since God's character never changes, we know that He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is always gracious, always loving, always holy, and always just. His ways are always perfect. However, that doesn't mean that what happened to me yesterday is a pattern or guarantee for what will happen tomorrow.

God's character and His love for me will never change. How that grace and faithfulness and love is expressed, may vary widely from one moment to the next. One day I may enjoy a remarkable answer to prayer. The next day I may be in the valley of suffering, waiting on the Lord to deliver me. He's always the same God but He does not display Himself in my life the same way all the time.

*5. God can answer my prayers any way He chooses.*

Everyone who has prayed very much, understands this truth. One night we fish and catch nothing. The next night our nets are filled to breaking point. I may be in prison one night and an angel may come to set me free or God may send an earthquake to deliver me. Or I may die in prison as many Christians have over the years. A loved one with a dreaded disease may be spared by God for several years, only to die from that disease eventually.

One day I may sense God's Spirit working so powerfully in my life, another day I may plod through the doldrums wondering if God is even listening! So, it goes for all of God's children. Our God is infinitely creative in the way He deals with us as He brings us to spiritual maturity. There are bright days and dark nights, and the Lord is in the middle of both.

*6. God will not tolerate any rivals to His throne.*

This is one of the clearest themes of the Bible. There is only one God and He demands our exclusive worship. After reminding the Jews that He had delivered them from Egypt, God made this the First Commandment: *"You shall have no other gods before me"* (Exodus 20:3). That's clear, isn't it? No other gods, period. God is number One and there is no number two. He will not share His glory with another - and that includes us!

*7. God is not obligated to live up to my expectations or explain Himself to me.*

This may be the most important statement regarding God's freedom. He doesn't bind Himself to do what we expect Him to do. God continually surprised His people in the Bible. Everything happened just as God promised, but very little worked out exactly the way people expected. He's the God of great surprises and He doesn't have to explain Himself to us. There are many questions we would all like to ask. Almost always our questions revolve around suffering, sadness, the death of loved ones, and times of personal disappointment.

I have found that the greater the sadness, the less likely we are to fully understand it. Small things we can figure out on our own, but great losses are usually hidden in the mind and heart of God.

**Deuteronomy 29:29** *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God.”*

God is far bigger than we imagine; His presence fills the universe; He is more powerful than we know; wiser than all the wisdom of the wisest men and women; His love is beyond human understanding; His grace has no limits; His holiness is infinite; His ways are past finding out; He is the one true God; He has no beginning and no end; He created all things and all things exist by His divine power; He has no peers; no one gives Him advice; no one can fully understand Him; He is absolutely perfect in all His ways.

There is nothing we can do, not even our praise and worship, which can add to Who God is. He did not create us because of any lack in Himself. God was not lonely. Were every person on earth to become an atheist, it would not impact who God is in any way. The belief or disbelief of the human race cannot change the reality of who God is. To believe in Him adds nothing to His perfection; to doubt Him takes nothing away. He rules all things, everywhere, at all times. Nothing escapes His notice. Nothing is beyond His control. He is beyond time and space, yet He controls them both. Time is the brush with which God paints His story on the canvas of human history. Eternity is the perspective from which we view that painting. This is our God!

As we ponder God, we are eventually led to a very humbling truth, one that is not mentioned often and is hardly believed when it is taught: **God does not need us.** If any concept flies in the face of contemporary Christianity, this is it. Down deep inside, most of us want to feel that we are important and necessary, and we like to think that God must have needed us, or else why would He have created us? In the absolute sense, God doesn't *need* anything or anyone. He didn't create us because He was in need, and He didn't save us because heaven was empty. He does not need our worship, our gifts, our obedience, our service, our prayers or anything else we do. There is no lack of any kind with God.

This is a very humbling, and for some people, a very frustrating truth. But ask yourself: Do you really think God can't get along without you? What if your entire congregation just disappeared? What if they had never even existed? Do you think the universe depends on us for its survival? Hardly.

The Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke His cheering disciples as He entered Jerusalem for the final time, He replied, *“If they keep quiet, the stones themselves will cry out”* (Luke 19:40). If He wants to, God can cause the trees to clap their hands and the mountains to sing out His praises. He can even make the rocks cry out in worship! The fact that God created us at all - is an act of His sovereign will. The fact that God saved us - is a miracle of His sovereign grace. The fact that God accepts our worship and rewards our obedience - is a miracle of His sovereign love.

How then shall we live, in light of this confronting reality? As we ponder this truth of God's freedom, many applications come to mind. Properly understood, it ought to lead us to a calm confidence in God even in the midst of unspeakable tragedy. It should also make us bold in our witness and strong in our prayers. If we believe these truths, we will find the strength to persevere over the long haul, knowing that even our foolish mistakes cannot cancel God's plans.

The truth of God's freedom ought to lead us to praise and worship. If it doesn't, then we haven't fully understood the biblical teaching. It is not that we will praise God directly for the pain and sadness around us or for the sinful acts of others. But we will praise God that He is able to work in, with, and through everything that happens, both the good and the bad, to accomplish His will, to make us more like Christ, and to bring glory to Himself.

We will say with the psalmist, *“Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker!”* (Psalm 95:6).

There is coming a day when *“every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2:9-11). If that day is coming, then why not get a head start and bow your knee now and confess that God is God and Jesus Christ is your Lord?

**The Lord is God and there is no other.** Can you say those words? Make it a public affirmation of your faith. And here’s the good news. If you really mean it, then you can take a deep breath, let God be God and all will be well.

There is abundant joy for those who truly accept the most fundamental truth in the entire universe:

**He’s God and we’re not.**