

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.*

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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GODS WHOM YOU HAVE NOT KNOWN #1

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ‘You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.’” (Deuteronomy 13.1-4 NASB)

One morning as I was before the Lord, I was considering many things that we had recently heard are happening in some parts of the body of Christ. Clearly, some of the Lord’s people are experiencing something that, at the very least, is shaking some of the religious foundations of Christendom. Simply, some of it does not seem to fit a biblical pattern. I use the expression “seem to fit” because I have a sense of caution at the moment. “Seem to fit” could go either way, meaning it does or it does not fit. At times, it might seem as if I contradict myself, but hang in there, I’ll bring it together.

Some believers are quick to write off any strange happening as if it comes from the devil, simply because what they see or hear about does not match their perception of how things ought to be. Sometimes our theology gets in the way of our breaking through to truly know and experience God in transforming ways. Just because something does not conform to our perception of how God works, that is, it does not fit in our box, does not mean that it is not God at work. Perhaps our box is too small; or our perceptions of biblical patterns are alright as far as they go, but they are still incomplete.

If we would just step back a bit and consider many of the stories in the Bible, we would have to admit that many of them are quite strange. God often worked in strange ways. To me, the story of Samson is a strange one, and yet Samson is commended in Hebrews 11, the chapter of faith. What if a man appeared on the scene today with strength manifested in some strange way, or better yet, the power of God were manifested in some way that seemed odd and contrary to our theology? How would we respond to it? To be sure, some would say the person is of the devil. But can we be so sure?

I believe one of the dangers we all face is building a box for the Lord and placing Him (as if we really could) in it and judging everything that we see or hear based on the template or what we have placed in the box. Of course, I trust that you understand that this is not a reference to a literal box but rather to the “spiritual” or “biblical” grid or template through which we filter what we see or hear in reference to the things of God. Denominational and non-denominational groups alike can build such boxes, and we as individuals can do likewise.

Believe me; we can unknowingly build these boxes and defend them even unto death. Unfortunately, the boxes themselves become a source of spiritual death for us as we find it impossible to step out with God when, by His spirit, He begins to do a new thing in and through His people.

I can speak to this matter from experience. For nearly 19 years, we gathered together with a loving group of saints. During this time, we truly experienced the love of the brethren, worship in the spirit, and dying to self (some might cringe at this one, but dying to self is a vital biblical principle). It was a wonderful time of growth for me and my wife. But there was something else that began to develop and grow during this time; it was pride. We began to think that there was nothing better than our group. Our teaching was the best, our conferences were the best, our pattern was the best, and the list went

on. Simply, others outside our sphere, along with their teaching or emphasis, were looked down upon. However, a day came when we saw that we had put the Lord in a box, and there was no room for the Lord to do a new work or to work in new ways. If someone endeavored to follow the Lord, no matter what the cost, the person was not fully accepted if what he sought to do did not match the collective teaching or group view. Over seven years ago, the Lord thrust us out of this group, like little birds being thrust out of a nest, to reveal to us the depths of the pride that we had developed during this time. I might add; the way He has been breaking this pride is by placing us in situations and with groups of His people that if you told us ten years ago that this was going to happen, we probably would have said, "No way!" Not only has He thrust us out, what we like to term "being launched out into the deep" (this phrase speaks to the personal testimony of our walk with the Lord), but He has literally moved us two states away after being in Richmond, VA for 35 years. Thank God for His love, mercy and, frankly, discipline.

Now, this is sort of a long introduction to the above verse and my time with the Lord. As I meditated on these matters, the Lord led me to Deuteronomy 13 and the phrase "**gods whom you have not known.**" When I read this passage, these words leapt out at me.

To understand this word, it is important to know the setting of Deuteronomy, which begins with:

These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel and Laban and Hazeroth and Dizahab. It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the LORD had commanded him to give to them, after he had defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites.... (Deuteronomy 1.1-4 NASB).

The Israelites met the God of heaven at Mount Sinai when the Lord spoke to them in the midst of the fire. Christ the Rock appeared to them, but they feared for their lives. **For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, then we will die** (Deuteronomy 5.25 NASB). They did not have a heart that would fear the Lord and keep His commandments always, so Moses was commissioned to stand before the Lord. Instead of God's divine laws being put into their minds and written on their hearts (see Hebrews 8.10), the law was written on stone tablets. If they had feared the Lord in the right way and willingly listened to Him speak from the midst of the fire and not run from the voice of the Lord, they would have been a people prepared to enter the land of promise. In eleven days, they would have arrived at Kadesh-barnea, readied in their hearts and minds to take possession of what the Lord had promised. Unfortunately for them, they were not ready, and the generation that the Lord had miraculously brought out of Egypt was disqualified from entering into Canaan. Instead, they were sent back into the wilderness for a total of forty years.

So, Moses recounted the history of the nation of Israel from the time of the coming out of Egypt to their arrival forty years later at the point of crossing over into the land of promise through the Jordan River. Moses declared to his people: **Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?** (Deuteronomy 4.34 NASB).

This was the God that they knew; He was a mighty God of signs and wonders, **as a well as** a God of trials and terrors. But what was their indictment? **You have been rebellious against the Lord** (Deuteronomy 9.7) In spite of all that the Lord had done to prove Himself to them and to prepare them for entering the land, they provoked the Lord from the day that they left Egypt until they arrived at the Jordan forty years later. In other words, the miraculous did not change their hearts. In fact, the Lord warned them that He might send prophets and dreamers of dreams that would bring forth signs and wonders that would come true in order to test their love for Him.

Think about it until the next issue! *And*, ask yourself: Who is the God that I have known?