

THEISM

God is Relevant

What you believe about God is important because your belief determines your behavior. Moreover, the extent of your believe in the relevancy of God largely determines the quality of your behavior and the extent that your conduct differs from that of unbelievers. You may ask how this is so. In answer, here are a few brief statements about how God is relevant to human behavior.

God is creator – Your belief about where you came from influences your behavior. If you believe that God is your creator (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7; 5:1-2; Deuteronomy 4:32; Job 10:8; Psalm 100:3; Isaiah 45:12; Mark 10:6; Hebrews 2:7), then you are likely to think that since God is a spirit (Numbers 16:22; 27:16; John 4:24; 2 Corinthians 3:17), and since you are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7), that you also have a spiritual nature (Isaiah 42:5; 1 Corinthians 2:11). Because you are a spiritual being, as well as a physical being made from the dust of the ground (Genesis 3:19, 23; Psalms 103:14), you will not think in terms of living by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4). To the extent that you recognize God as your maker, your behavior will be governed by God's authority, and you will expect that someday you will be resurrected by God to immortality (Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:53-54; 2 Corinthians 5:1-6; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Timothy 1:10). On the other hand, if you do not believe in the existence or relevancy of God, then you are likely to think that your life originated from non-life and that you are only physical and temporal. If you do not believe in God, then your reasoning and emotions will govern your behavior. Moreover, you can only conclude that physical death is your final destiny.

God is law-giver and judge – Your belief about the source of law and ethical standards influences your behavior. If you believe that God is the supreme lawgiver, i.e., that God provides the ethical, social, political, cultural and legal standards for life (Genesis 1:28; 5:13-21; 8:16-17; 12:1-3; Exodus 3:5ff; 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 4:2; Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 22:36-40), then you are likely to believe that there are absolute universal standards applicable to everyone. This means that you are accountable to God (Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:12; Hebrews 4:13), will be judged by God (Acts 17:31; Ps. 9:8; 96:13; John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:16; Hebrews 9:27; 12:23), and will receive an eternal destiny to either heaven or hell (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:24, 28-29; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-9), dependent upon whether or not you have lived in faithful obedience towards God (Hebrews 3:14-19; 5:9; 10:36; 1 Peter 4:17-18; Revelation 2:10). This also means that you are likely to consider yourself a sinner (Romans 3:10, 23; Galatians 3:22) and that whenever you sin you need to repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; 20:19) in order to be right with your fellow human being and with God. Moreover, since God holds you accountable, there is incentive for you to repent (Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19) and a demand that you love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). On the other hand, if you do not believe in the existence or relevancy of God, then you are likely to think that there are no absolute universal standards. Without God, law and ethics are relative, situational and autonomous. Your ethical standards are subject to change with the fluctuating political, social, and cultural values of your society. Without belief in God you will not likely consider yourself a sinner and therefore are not ever likely to think you need to repent. Moreover, without belief in the existence and relevancy of God there is no universal commandment to love your neighbor nor can you have any absolute conviction about any eternal destiny. Without belief in God you will probably consider yourself judged only by yourself and your fellow human beings whose judgmental standards are constantly changing with fluctuating social values.

God interacts with humanity – Your belief that God interacts with humanity influences your behavior. If you believe that God has acted through Noah (Hebrews 11:7), Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; Hebrews 11:8), Moses (Exodus 3:4 - 4:23; Hebrews 11:23-27), the prophets (2 Kings 17:13; Hebrews 1:1), Jesus (John 3:16; Romans 8:3; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 1:2), and the apostles (John 15:15-16; Acts 9:15) to bless humanity, then you are likely to accept the idea that God can work in and through you to accomplish his purposes (Romans 8:28). Moreover, if you believe that God has raised up deliverers to overthrow evil persons and regimes (Judges 2:16, 18; 3:9, 15), then you are likely to believe that God will either bless or punish you for your behavior (Romans 11:22). If you believe that God blesses and rewards the faithful (Deuteronomy 7; 28:1-14; Hebrews 11:6), then you will likely be motivated to faithful obedience (Matthew 24:45-47; 25:21, 23). If you believe that God directs the course of human history according to principles of righteousness, then you will likely seek to influence your community, state, or nation to be righteous (Proverbs 11:11; 14:34). If you believe that God curses the wicked, then you will be inclined to turn the wicked from their ways (2 Chronicles 7:14; Ezekiel 33:6-9). On the other hand, if you believe that there is no God (or that if there is but that God has nothing to do with humanity) then you will not be motivated toward godly living because you will probably believe that everyone's lifestyle is equally valid. You will not seek to influence your community or nation toward godliness because you will consider that the wisdom of humanity is sufficient for its own guidance. You will not be inclined to turn people from their wicked ways, except to provide for public safety, because everyone will be considered to have the right to determine his or her own values and courses of action. Moreover, if you do not believe that God interacts with humanity, you may consider that those who do so believe are unrealistic.

God justifies the faithful – Your belief that God will justify the faithful (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38) influences your behavior. If you believe that God wants you to believe and obey him (Deuteronomy 13:4; 1 Samuel 15:22; Luke 11:28; 1 Peter 1:14), and that God will acquit you of all sin and consider you righteous because of your belief in and obedience to him (Romans 4:3, 5-15; Psalm 31:1-2; James 2:23; Genesis 15:6), then you will be motivated to serve God faithfully. You will serve God because you realize that he is Lord and you should be his servant (Romans 7:6; 1 Corinthians 7:35; Colossians 3:23-24; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 9:14; 12:28). Your service, however, will not flow from a sense of duty, but from gratitude for what God has done for you (1 John 4:10-11, 19). Therefore, you will worship and praise God through singing (Romans 15:9; Hebrews 2:12). You will express your thanksgiving in prayers (2 Corinthians 8:16; 9:15; Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6; 1 Timothy 4:3-4). Because you realize that God cares about you, you will go to him with your petitions (Ephesians 1:15-20; Colossians 1:9-12). On the other hand, if you do not believe that God will reward, or that by his grace you can be justified before him, then you will not trust or obey God. You will resist him being your Lord and master. You will have no sense of gratitude toward God, nor will you desire to worship or praise him. If you are seen going through the motions of worship, it may be because you perceive some benefit in being seen by others as paying homage to God. Your apparent worship is disingenuous.

Whether or not God is relevant in motivating your behavior depends upon your knowledge of God. Without knowledge of God, you cannot understand the horrors of sin, properly critique the world, have lasting hope for the future, or be able to find meaning and purpose in life. Ancient Israel became wicked as it departed from the knowledge of God (Hosea 4:6). To turn a wicked people to righteous living requires that they acquire a greater knowledge of God.