



Portrait of God

Viewing the Divine through His Work of Redemption



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To the Thomson Church of Christ
in Thomson, Georgia, 1970–1985,
where the seeds for this book
were planted and watered.





Also written by Frank Chesser:

The Spirit of Liberalism
Voyage of Faith
Thinking Right about God
The Heart of Isaiah
The Man of Chebar





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FOREWORD

Frank Chesser's latest book, *Portrait of God*, is destined to become a classic. Reminiscent of the popular works of Dr. Charles Pfeiffer on biblical geography and history (but without his pedantic style), Chesser traces the scheme of redemption, which is the theme of Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation. In so doing, the author enables us to see not only the plan but also the beauty of God.

Frank Chesser has been blessed with the ability to use words as an artist uses subtleties of color to capture a beautiful scene. I know of no other author who can paint word pictures so beautifully. This is a book that thrills, instructs, and rivets the attention of the reader, making reading it easy and enjoyable. Though it is a large book, once I began reading it I couldn't put it down until I had read the last word.

This work is also complete, leaving no questions, no sense of vagueness, no lack of direction. There are some great commentaries on the individual books of the Bible but nothing that covers its entire scope as does *Portrait of God*. It reads much as a chronological Bible but with keen insight leading you all the way. Every student of God's word needs to read this book. It has greatly enhanced my appreciation of the love and grace of God as the Bible unfolds His nature and His plan to redeem fallen man. A congregation of men and women that studies this work together will be transformed. In turn, they will greatly influence the community in which they live.

Don McWhorter
Fayette, Alabama
Host of *Bible Talk*
Television Program





PREFACE

On September 13, 1970, Cherry and I drove into Thomson, Georgia, a city in which the church of Christ was non-existent. Darkness had fallen and the lights of the city gave its population of six thousand an appearance of being larger than the light of day would prove it to be. The elders of our supporting congregation, Palo Alto in Panama City, Florida, desired either to establish a congregation of the Lord in an area they deemed to have great potential, or to attempt to build up a weak, struggling work in the state of Georgia. Due to our confidence in these elders, J. G. Sorrell, W. A. Teel, and Gerald McCalister, when they decided upon Thomson as the area they felt had the most potential, we agreed to go, sight unseen. This town became our home for the next fifteen years.

We discovered a few members of the church who had moved to Thomson, but because there was no congregation there, had not attended services on a regular basis for many years. We found Thomson to be a ripe field and soon began to experience growth by way of conversions and restorations. Due to the make-up of the congregation, we felt we needed to start at the beginning, and that fifteen-year study formed the basis of this book. Commencing in Genesis, with written questions on each chapter, we developed a verse-by-verse study of the historical Old Testament and a portion of Job. Six years of Sunday evenings were utilized as opportunities to preach through most of the prophets. The years since have witnessed steady spiritual construction on this foundation.

Consequently, this book is the product of thirty-four years of Bible study. This study has proved a blessing in immeasurable ways. The Old Testament in particular has provided insights into the nature and workings of God that could never



have been enjoyed apart from it. The spiritual value of starting where God started in Genesis 1 and moving slowly and methodically down the path of divine revelation to its culmination in Christ and the church, and to the ultimate victory of Revelation is incalculable. This work constitutes an effort to place into the hands of those who desire to read it, a tool that will hopefully increase their understanding, love, and appreciation for the Bible, and for God who gave it.

Genuine gratitude is expressed to James Andrews, who is unexcelled in his editing abilities; to Don McWhorter, a true Bible scholar, for his kind words regarding this work; to Peggy Coulter for her expertise in book design and marketing; and to my beloved wife, Cherry, a great Bible student and teacher—the most competent woman I know—for her aid and encouragement in this effort, for typing the book and for the questions she formulated at the close of each chapter.

May this work glorify God in the promotion of His truths, will, and way in the hearts of men and women.

Frank Chesser
February 2004



1

WORLD PRIOR TO SIN Genesis 1-2

The Face of God

In a father's strong arm and a mother's smile,
In the winsome ways of an innocent child;
In a canopy of blue and clouds of white,
In the sparkling host of a sable night;
In beams of sunlight on meadows of green,
In the gentle touch of a summer's rain;
In the snow of winter and the flowers of spring,
In the torpid movement of a forest stream;
In the ocean's depth and the mountain's height,
In symphonic songs of birds in flight;
In the roar of thunder and the lightning's place,
In the radiant gleam of a baby's face;
In roses dipped in crimson and bathed in dew,
In a flame of fire and a spider's web, too;
In the billowing spray of an ocean's wave,
In a sunset sky at the close of day;
I saw the face of God.

INSPIRATION AFFIRMS THE TRUTHFULNESS of this sentiment. Endeavoring to press upon the minds of the Gentiles the inexcusable state of their unbelief, the apostle Paul declared:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are



made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

Nature is a revelation of God. The reflective mind sees the face of God in every aspect of the material world. The psalmist averred,

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard (Ps. 19:1–3).

Thus, nature is multilingual. Its immeasurable beauty, intricacy, and complexity trumpets in every language: “There is a God in heaven” (Dan. 2:28).

However, the voice of nature is impotent regarding the revelation of the will of God. It can proclaim “God is,” but not “God said.” It can disclose the face of God but not the mind of God. Man may descend into the depths of the earth, walk the floors of the oceans, and set his foot on some distant planet, but the revelations of his journeys will not contain one word of God’s will for his life. The world of nature has no knowledge of sin, Christ, Calvary, or redemption. Man may search the world of nature, but only the Holy Spirit can search the mind of God. That search has been made, and its results have been recorded in the Bible (1 Cor. 2:9–13). Therefore, the Bible is the mind of God in language adapted to the mind of man.

The Bible is one book. Its sixty-six books are actually chapters encompassing the central theme of redemption. When sin became a reality, God headed toward Calvary. The cross is God’s answer for sin. From Genesis 3:6 onward, every word in the Bible relates to redemption. God is omniscient. His knowledge neither grows nor diminishes. Elihu was right when he described God as being perfect in knowledge (Job 36:4). God knew Adam and Eve’s choice even before they made it, so man’s entrance into sin did not put Him in a dilemma. The scene that transpired on Golgotha was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20), according to the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).

Viewing eternity as possessing the component of time, there has never been a moment when the cross of Christ and the church of Christ were not in the mind of God. Paul describes



the gospel that centers on the cross, producing reconciliation in the one body, or church, as the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 3:1–11).

The Bible embraces two worlds: the world prior to sin and the world subsequent to sin. The real division of the Bible occurs at their intersection. There is, of course, a dividing line between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jeremiah foretold of God's new covenant with His people (Jer. 31:31–34). Hebrews 8:6–12 quotes Jeremiah's prophecy and applies it to the gospel of Christ. Hebrews 8:13 depicts the Old Testament as decaying, growing old, and vanishing away. In contrast with the old covenant, the new covenant is a better testament with better promises and a better hope (Heb. 7:19; 7:22; 8:6). The New Testament is as superior to the Old Testament as is the blood of Christ to the blood of animals (Heb. 9:12–14). The authoritative power of the law of Moses was abrogated at Calvary (Col. 2:14). There is, indeed, a great division to be made between the Mosaic system that started at Sinai and the glorious gospel of God's Son.

The real division in the Bible is between Genesis 2 and 3, not between Malachi and Matthew. Genesis 3:6 to Revelation 22:21 points to God's remedy for man's sin in Christ and Calvary, and God's means of appropriating the provisions thereof in the obedience of faith. There was no sin in the world of Genesis 1 and 2, thus, no need for redemption through Christ.

Two words sum up Genesis 1: *God* and *perfection*. Verse 1 introduces God, and verse 31 describes the perfection of God's creative work. "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Exod. 20:11). With a simple "God said," everything external to the Godhead came rushing into existence. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth" (Ps. 33:6).

The Key to Understanding Spiritual Things

The material universe is not the focus of Genesis 1. Everything material is entirely insignificant except as it relates to spiritual verities. The theme of Genesis 1 is God. God is mentioned by name thirty-two times in thirty-one verses. God begins His revelation to man by offering him insights into His



nature. Genesis 1 is God's saying, "Let us begin by telling you something about Myself."

Such traits as divine sovereignty, supreme power, infinite knowledge, wisdom, grace, and love are exhibited in Genesis 1. This emphasis continues as the biblical record unfolds. In the ultimate sense, the theme of Genesis 1 is the theme of the Bible. The Bible in its entirety is about God. Redemption grows out of the nature of God. Understanding redemption to the degree that it can be understood is dependent upon intensive mental grappling with the nature of God.

Redemption involves sin. The price paid for sin is Calvary, and the terminal price that man will pay should he refuse or neglect to appropriate the benefits of the cross in the obedience of faith is separation from God for eternity. "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). The abhorrent nature of sin, the unspeakable tragedy of the cross, and the indescribable horror of the eternal world of the damned cannot be grasped without a good understanding of the nature of God.

Every trait of God's marvelous character was displayed in the flood. Every attribute of God unveiled in Genesis 1 also appears in Genesis 6–8. Noah is described as a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). For more than a century (Gen. 6:3), the marvelous mercy of God was tendered to a depraved world in pleas for penitence while the "longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah" (1 Pet. 3:20). God's holiness and justice were manifested in judgment against a world where the "wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). The flood was a revelation of the nature of God.

Throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, God disclosed Himself to man in law, teaching, preaching, promises, prophecy, providence, blessings, and acts of judgment. The final portrait of God's nature is seen in Christ. When Philip asked to see the Father, Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Veritably, the Bible in its entirety is a revelation of the nature of God.

Two words sum up Genesis 2: *man* and *innocence*. In Genesis 2, God bypasses days one through five of Genesis 1 and



focuses on day six. This reemphasizes the nature of God and the nature of the revelation that proceeds from the mind of God. God is a Spirit (John 4:24). The Bible is a divine revelation that pertains to the spirit and to spiritual things. The first five days of God's creative work produced the material universe with its fish and fowls. The material world with its soulless inhabitants is consequential only as it relates to man and spiritual things. Man is the steward thereof. Its very use is governed by spiritual principles. The brief references to the gold and precious stones of Havilah and the provisions for man's physical sustenance point to God's love, grace, and goodness in making arrangements for man's every need.

God's Love and Man's Free Will

On the sixth day, God climaxed His creative work with man. Man's very existence and nature offer further insight into the nature of God. God is a social being. The reality of man is proof thereof. God is love (1 John 4:8). Love demands an object. God created man as the object of His love. God loves man, and God greatly desires for man to love Him. Man's very being testifies to the social and loving nature of God.

God created man as a volitional being. That action was essential if man was to reciprocate the love of God. Free will is a cardinal constituent of love. It inheres in love just as surely as heat is native to the sun. Love cannot be coerced. It is not the fruit of impassioned supplication. It is not bubbly eruptions of man's emotional being. Love is an act of the mind. The mind loves because it desires to love. Deep and immense pleasure is derived from love freely bestowed on its chosen object of affection.

The joy of this love encompasses both the giver and the recipient. God created all things for His pleasure. Thus, God delights in the upright (Prov. 11:20), in those who deal truly (Prov. 12:22), and in the prayer of the righteous (Prov. 15:8). This pleasure flows from the superlative love of God who eagerly desires to clothe every man in its rich benefits. Human expression of free will in choosing to love God brings great pleasure to God. Man is a million light-years removed from being God. Even daring to compare man with God is unthinkable.



One would fare far better attempting to compare a dewdrop to the flood of Noah's day, the light of a match to the brilliance of the sun, or a pebble to the universe.

Yet, there is a part of God's nature in every man. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). The pleasures that God receives from man's love finds a kinship experience in man. Marriage as designed by God entails a man and a woman expressing their free will by electing to love one another. Intense gratification results from such expressions of love. Does such delight ensue from a programmed machine that exclaims, "I love you"? No more than God could delight in a robot of flesh that submits to His will apart from its own will. The very nature of love necessitates free will.

Grace in a Perfect World

Genesis 2 points to the beginning of the role of grace in man's relationship with God. Did man deserve to be created? Could Adam point to Eve, whose beauty and loveliness far surpassed the winsome world of nature, and claim her as a work of merit? Were Adam and Eve entitled to the resplendence and provisions of Eden? Could the first human pair in perfect purity, by hands divine, gaze upon the innumerable wonders of their paradise home and exclaim, "How deserving we are"? Grace intensified a hundredfold with the entrance of sin, but that does not negate the reality of grace even in the paradisaical world of perfection and innocence. Adam and Eve were conceived in the womb of divine grace. They arose from a handful of dust and a solitary rib as a work of grace. Every breath and step were taken under the canopy of the marvelous, incomprehensible grace of God.

Harmony Between God's Role and Man's Role

Genesis 2 points to the unity characteristic of grace, law, love, and obedience. The divine prohibition relative to partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil signifies human free will. Only a volitional being can obey law. The negative injunction of Genesis 2:17 was a test of Adam's and Eve's faith, love, and loyalty. Grace and law are not enemies. They do not



negate each other. Rather than being antagonistic, they are complementary.

Biblical faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). The heartbeat of faith is “God said.” Apart from a word from God, there can be no demonstration of faith. Faith does not aver, “I think, I feel, I like.” Faith shouts, “God said.” Noah’s faith looked to God’s pattern for the construction of the ark. “Thus did Noah according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Gen. 6:22). Noah fashioned the ark by faith (Heb. 11:7).

Abraham listened to God’s instructions, and his faith began a humanly torturous journey to a mountain in Moriah (Gen. 22:1–2). Hence, Abraham’s offering of Isaac was by faith (Heb. 11:17).

Israel listened to God speak (Josh. 6:1–5) and then proceeded to encircle Jericho in a week of marching. Therefore, “by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Heb. 11:30). Paul speaks of the “work of faith” (1 Thess. 1:3) and the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:26). Faith cannot operate apart from divine revelation any more than the moon can shine without the sun. Check the pulse of faith and you will hear an incessant, “God said, God said, God said.”

Like faith, love looks to a word from God to serve as a means of its expression. Love does not ride the rail of human will, desire, feeling, or reasoning. Love does not assert, “This is what I like, feel, or think,” but rather, “This is what God said.” Love delights in God’s commandments (Ps. 119:47). Love affirms, “Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold” (Ps. 119:127). Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15), “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (14:23), and “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings” (14:24). The apostle John added: “And this is love, that we walk after his commandments” (2 John 6).

Obedience to God’s will is love prompting faith to submit to the great I AM. The only thing that God requires of man is “faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). Compliance with the law of God is not legalism. Trembling reverence for every word of God is not bibliolatry. Submission to the will of God does not



nullify grace. Obedience is love moving faith to embrace grace and appropriate its provisions to one's soul. Grace teaches (Tit. 2:11–12). Every law of God is grace instructing man as to every action that faith must take in order to enjoy its promised blessings. The trust of faith is firmly riveted in God and His grace, and not in the specific act of faith. The obedience of faith is love perfecting itself (Rom. 16:26; 1 John 2:5) by adhering to the demands of grace while relying wholly on God as the source of every good thing (James 1:17).

By grace God provided a law for man in Eden (Gen. 2:17). The forbidding nature of that law was a positive expression of divine love. God loved Adam and Eve. He formed Adam from lifeless dust and Eve from Adam's bone. They bore His likeness. They were exclusively His. He delighted in them. He greatly desired their love, faith, trust, loyalty, and devotion. Such traits are innate to free will. They necessitate a law as a means of expression. The continual presence of the forbidden tree allowed Adam and Eve a means of displaying their fidelity to God. Responding to God's grace in the obedience of faith, as a manifestation of their love, allowed the continuity of the blessings of grace.

The world of Genesis 1 and 2 was a perfect world. The earth was cradled in oceans and was bathed in balmy breezes and a Caribbean-like climate. The first human pair lived and worked in ineffable intimacy with God. They feasted on edible delights, satiated their thirst from sparkling brooks, and were sung to sleep by symphonic songs of nature under star-studded heavens. They played in meadows of green, and clothed the air with laughter. Their home was a citadel of endless joy. There were no problems to solve, no arguments to settle, and no wounds to heal. There were no thoughts hanging on threads of suspicion, no words punctuated with sounds of anger, and no looks of displeasure to mar the countenance. Their cheeks were free of tears; their bodies, of pain; their hearts, of grief; and their souls, of guilt. God, perfection, man, and innocence constituted the world of Genesis 1 and 2.



Questions

1. How is nature impotent regarding the revelation of the will of God?
2. What is the central theme of the Bible?
3. What is God's answer for sin?
4. When did God formulate the scheme of redemption?
5. What are the two worlds that the Bible embraces?
6. Contrast the old covenant with the new covenant.
7. What constitutes the real division of the Bible?
8. What two words sum up Genesis 1?
9. Why was there no need for redemption in Genesis 1 and 2?
10. Why must one know the nature of God in order to understand redemption?
11. What price must man pay should he refuse or neglect to appropriate the benefits of the cross?
12. How was the flood a revelation of the nature of God?
13. What two words sum up Genesis 2?
14. How does the creation of man offer insight into the nature of God?
15. Why was grace essential even in the paradisiacal world of perfection and innocence?
16. What was the purpose of the negative injunction of Genesis 2:17?
17. How does one obtain biblical faith?
18. How does man show his love for God?
19. What is the only thing that God requires of man?
20. What are some traits that are innate to man's free will?





2

BACKGROUND OF REDEMPTION Genesis 3–12

THESE TEN CHAPTERS ARE IMMERSSED in inexpressible tragedy. The world prior to sin and the world following sin are as distant from each other as are the ends of the universe. This section introduces redemption through Christ and Calvary. This good news is tempered by the reality of its necessity. The masses of the world will face the judgment having neglected or refused to appropriate the provisions of the cross in the obedience of faith.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:13–14).

Commencement of Sin

Genesis 3 opens with Satan and Eve in mortal combat. Satan attacked God by assailing His word. He convinced Eve that God could not be trusted, His word was not based on truth, and He was attempting to deny her Godlike status that was hers by right. Genesis 3:6 is the introduction to sin. The man has not lived who can adequately depict the vile, odious, grotesque insanity of sin. If the verbal abilities of the Ciceros of every age could be deposited into one mind and tongue, with the instruction to depict for man the true nature of sin, after climbing to the height of his potential and exhausting his