

The God Who Is Love
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God is love, according to St. John, for love is of God. "Love" is the only noun that is directly equated with the person of God. God is just, holy, good and many other things, but these are attributes of God. Love is not an attribute of God. God is love.

It must be easy, then, to know all about God. We just have to know what love is, and then we know what God is. Love has characteristics; thus, God has these same characteristics. It's a math equation: $x=y$, therefore $y=x$. If you know what "y" is, then you know all about "x."

But God is not an object of our speculation, to be pinned to a piece of Styrofoam and studied. God is the active subject; we are the objects of God's creative and sustaining energies. No human conception can quantify God. No created reality can fitly or even dimly describe the essence of the uncreate God. There are no earthly categories that can make even remotely comprehensible the mystery that is the essence of our God. (Isa. 55:8-9)

God is "ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible." All that we truly know about God is that we truly know nothing about God. To know God, we must "un-know" everything. The knowledge of God, to the extent that He can be known, is found in hesychastic silence.

Expressing the knowledge God starting with our created categories, even categories used in God's self-revelation – "love is this, and God is love; therefore, God is this and not that" – is to reduce God to a created concept, to diminish God to a product of our rationalization. Defining God in terms of human conceptions, even our most sublime notions, is to exalt ourselves and our created being to a place of supposed superiority over God by containing and constraining God within our mental energies. We make an idol of our own imagining and bow down to worship it.

As the people of Israel were delivered from slavery in Egypt, God demonstrated by the ten plagues and the final deliverance of Israel through the underworld entanglements of the *yam suph* that the God of Israel was supreme in all the earth, one by one humiliating the demons who had arrogated to themselves the worship of the people of Egypt – worship that was due to God alone. The people of God despoiled their captors and walked out of Egypt laden with the gold jewelry of their Egyptian former masters.

God cut a covenant with the people of Israel: He would be their god and they would be His people. He gave Moses the terms of the covenant, as a supreme ruler would dictate the terms of a suzerainty treaty with the vassal kingdom. The people of Israel vowed obedience to the commands of God, and the elders of Israel ate and drank in the presence of God. Blood of sacrificial animals was shed, and peace offerings made. God became one with the people of Israel. (Exodus 24)

Moses went up into the presence of God for forty days and forty nights, receiving a sublime revelation of the things of heaven (Heb. 8:5) to be the lifeways of the people of Israel. Israel was to be a light to the nations, a witness to the blessedness of the nation whose God is the Lord, so that nations would stream to her and join themselves to her. (Deut. 4:5-8)

Israel, impatient with Moses's delay, demanded that Aaron, God's high priest, make them an idol god after the manner of Egypt and the nations around them. (Ex. 32:1) They wanted a god that would fit into their categories. They wanted to be *a reflection of* their neighbors, not *a light to* them.

So they brought Aaron their gold jewelry – the very gold that God had entrusted to them when He rescued them from slavery in Egypt – and with that gift of God, Aaron engraved a golden calf, proclaiming to the people of Israel that this was the god who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt. (Ex. 32:4) Aaron did not proclaim a new deity; he reduced the “ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible” glory of Israel to the cozy likeness of a calf that eats grass. (Ps. 106:20)

The people of Israel wanted a familiar god, a comfortable god who would accept them as they “ate and drank, and rose up to play,” (Ex. 32:6) not the holy, frightening, thundering, fiery God of Moses. Their calf god was a thing of beauty, made from the sacrificial giving of the people, significantly connected with important events in their sacred history. It made present to them the sense of the divine in a most approachable, non-demanding, non-threatening way and made them relevant to their contemporaries. They could come to their god just like they were, could “play” in front of their god, and their god was happy with them.

The true God of Israel, upon witnessing the perfidy of His covenant people, would have wiped them off the face of the earth, had it not been for the intercession of Moses, who stood boldly before God and called upon God's abundant longsuffering and forgiveness. (Ex. 32:11-14) God relented, and Israel was saved.

Moses was a type of Jesus, standing in the breach before God and pleading for love and mercy despite the unfaithfulness of the people. And because God truly is a god of love and mercy, we too are given a chance to repent, to change our ways, to forswear our sins and once again walk in the ways of God. But we must receive God on His terms, and not on our own, to know the love that is God.

We have seen the fulness of the Godhead in the face of Christ, the Son and living Word of God, the Light begotten of the Light. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” he said. (Jn. 14:15) The person of God with whom we have to do has normative standards for the relationship.

When Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, He sent us the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. The Body of Christ, the Church, is the pillar and foundation of that truth, entrusted with the written Word of God, as it has been taught through the centuries of the witness of His Body. We are not left alone.

God is love, and love is known in Jesus, in His Body, the Church, called to be a light to the nations. We the Church must prove ourselves worthy of that calling, faithfully making present the God who is love. We must not kowtow to the demands of culture, presenting them a comfy golden calf for their worship. The Church, the Body of Christ, must intercede for the people, and prophetically call them to repentance, to the worship of the true God who is love.