

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #51: GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO MAN AS SEEN IN BIBLICAL PREPOSITIONS

By John Temples

The Bible is many things: an inspired history of mankind...a guidebook to heaven...a book that reveals God, Christ, heaven, hell, and many other marvelous and majestic concepts.

Something else about the Bible: it tells us how God's relationship with man has changed over the ages. God related to Adam and Eve in a different way than He does to us today. His relationship--His covenants and arrangements--with various nations and individuals has changed over time.

There are several ways we can look at the Bible and see these changing relationships. One way is to examine the Bible *historically*--looking at such events as the creation, the fall of man, the Flood, the call of Abraham, the rise and fall of the nation of Israel, and the establishment of the church. We can see different ways God has dealt with man through the centuries.

Another way is to examine the Bible *dispensationally*. A dispensation is a system, order, or arrangement one party has for dealing with another. It is synonymous with a contract, covenant, or system of laws. God has dealt with man through three different arrangements or dispensations: the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian. During the Patriarchal age or dispensation, God dealt with people on an individual basis, speaking to various patriarchs (heads of families), such as Noah or Abraham. In the Mosaic dispensation, God dealt with a nation, Israel. The final dispensation is the Christian one, in which we live now. It is a universal or worldwide covenant.

Let me share with you one more way to see in Scripture God's changing relationship with us over the ages. That way is to examine the prepositions the Bible uses to describe the interaction between God and man.

I consider myself a wordsmith. I love words. I write constantly; I read incessantly. If I am not solving crosswords, I am making them. I realize that to many, studying words is about as exciting as getting a root canal. But hopefully I can instill a little excitement about words in this article. Words are vehicles of thought, and God has communicated with us through words in His Bible.

Here is something we need to consider as we begin: even though the Bible is an inspired book, it uses the same grammar rules, parts of speech, and words that we use in everyday conversation. For many years scholars thought the Bible was written in some mysterious “Holy Spirit Greek.” They eventually discovered that the Greek of the New Testament was actually the everyday Greek spoken by the average citizen. They called it “Koine Greek”--common Greek.

One of the parts of speech is the lowly preposition. Prepositions are generally short words, but they are vital to written and spoken communication. *For*, *in*, *at*, and *through* are prepositions. A preposition is defined as “a word that links nouns, pronouns, and phrases to other words in a sentence. A preposition usually indicates the temporal, spatial, or logical relationship of its object to the rest of the sentence.”

I can see your eyes glazing over, so here is a simpler definition: “a word which precedes a noun and shows the noun’s relationship to the rest of the sentence.” Did you notice the word “relationship” in this definition? Remember, in this article we are considering God’s changing relationship with man over time. Hence, the importance of studying Bible prepositions.

Sometimes prepositions rise to the level of defining doctrinal truth. Take Acts 2:38--“Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.” The preposition in that sentence is the word *for*. Does *for* mean “in order to obtain” or “because of” remission of sins already obtained? The English word “for” can mean either. But Greek is more precise. The Greek word translated “for” is *eis*, which always means “to obtain.” Many people think Acts 2:38 means we are baptized “because of” sins already remitted; but the truth is, we are baptized “in order to obtain” remission of sins.

You are thinking, “What does this have to do with God’s relationship to man?”
Here goes:

GOD’S CHANGING RELATIONSHIP WITH MAN AS SEEN IN BIBLE PREPOSITIONS

“God above us.” This was the original relationship between God and man, and remains as such even today. The Maker is always higher than the thing made. Isaiah 55:9 says, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” And the Psalmist reminds us, “The Lord is great in Zion, and he is high above all the peoples.”

Now, “God above us” is certainly not a very *intimate* relationship. But under the Old Testament, God could not be intimate with His people because of their sin and idolatry. He had to constantly emphasize to them His power and “unreachability.” Here is a typical Old Testament warning: “Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven and you on earth; therefore let your words be few.”

Yes, that’s “Old Testament”; but this idea of “God above us” is a healthy attitude even for us today. We need to resist the urge so many people have to trivialize or humanize God, to bring God down to our level. We need to always remember that He is “God above us.”

“God against us” is an apt description of the next phase of God’s relationship with man. Man’s intimate connection with God was lost when Adam and Eve sinned. Sin causes God to be against us to this day. The Lord said to the church at Ephesus, “I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Revelation 2:4). King Josiah said in 2 Kings 22:13, “Great is the wrath of the Lord that is against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book.” Colossians 2:14 calls the rigorous Old Testament law “the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us.” When we live a life of sin and refuse to obey God, we make Him our enemy. James 4:4--”Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants

to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” That is “God against us.”

But God would not give up on us, and a change of relationship came. It became “**God with us.**” A glorious angel announced this change of relationship, saying, “Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Behold, a virgin shall be with Child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated “God with us”” (Matthew 1:22-23).

This is the marvel of the ages: the Creator willingly entered into His creation and became a man. The invisible God became visible in Jesus. At the last supper, Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us” (John 14:8). The next verse says, “Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

But even “God with us” is not the ultimate. Because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, God is able to once again have intimate fellowship with us, and now it is...”**God for us.**” Romans 8:31--“If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Too many people, even some Christians, see God as a tyrant in the heavens, keeping score of our every slip-up, deriving some kind of pleasure out of seeing us stumble. But the Bible assures us that God is FOR US--He wants us to do well. He does not want us to fail. He wants to forgive us and bring us to live with Him. He has always been “for us,” but sin stood in the way of fellowship. Now, we can be sinless in Christ.

There is yet one more Biblical preposition that describes a relationship with God that we could only dare to hope for and dream of. It is the ultimate expression of relationship, the ultimate evidence of communion with Him. We have seen these prepositional indicators of the relationship between God and man:

- God above us
- God against us

- God with us
- God for us

Now, wonder of wonders, we have “**God in us.**” “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). 2 Corinthians 6:16 says, “God has said, ‘I will dwell in them, and walk among them; I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” The apostle John simply could not get over this thought. He said, “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us” (1 John 4:12).

God is still above us, but thanks to Christ, He is no longer against us if we are His. He is with us...for us...and even in us. Can you say, “Thank you, Lord”? --John Temples