

Have you ever had anything personalized? Something like a wallet or a belt? People have this done to make something very special, and to elevate the significance of it in their minds.

We personalize many things in our lives to make the attachment to us stronger. Music is one example. We typically don't like "elevator music", because it has been stripped of the band's personality that created it or introduced it. We have a need to associate music with the people that inspired it; so we go to scream at their concerts and stand in line for their autographs.

The personalization of something makes it come alive, and therefore we pay much more attention to it. In the same way, particular people that we know interest us much more than the general throng. There is a great shift in emotional level within us when we recognize a personality, someone that we know, out of a crowd. It is easy to realize this power, for instance, if we were to hear of a terrible airplane crash. We would be sad and concerned, but if we found out that a very close friend or loved one was involved in the tragedy, our interest would take on an entirely different intensity.

In a more positive vein, we might think about seeing a group of babies somewhere, perhaps on a television commercial. Our interest is heightened, for almost everybody loves babies. But when you see your baby, or your grandbaby, it is a wholly different thing. You really love that baby!

I illustrated this principle in a class once with the idea of rabbits. I showed a picture of a rabbit in a garden, then a picture of the Energizer bunny, and then a picture of Bugs Bunny. There was some interest, which improved as the figures took on a recognizable personality. Then I showed a small ceramic figure of a rabbit, followed by a stuffed animal version. Interest increased even more. But when I brought out two live bunny rabbits, and let the students hold and pet them, we were at maximum attention.

This idea of personalization, or looking at things on a personal basis, is very important to our concept of God. When I think about how I can convince someone that there indeed is a personal God, I have to somehow elevate their attention in the same way. They may believe very strongly in the notion of right and wrong, and may guide their behavior according to righteous principles. But they have to see that there is infinite value in going to the next level, and raising their belief from something impersonal to something very personal. Until they can get to that level, they cannot grasp the true message of God and His Good.

We normally relate this concept to people in a bad sense, just as saying that someone is "the personification of evil". A similar word is "incarnation". This simply means that a principle has become embodied, or taken the form of a person. We use this type of idea to refer to Hitler, or Saddam Hussein, or Osama Ben Ladin; perhaps we use it even to refer to someone that we have to deal with here at home.

The same attitude can be applied to Good. God is the Personification (or more properly, Deification) of Good, and Jesus is Good Incarnate. Jesus is a person, and we must have a relationship with Him as our personal Savior. This is the very reason that Christ came down to earth, to show how God wants a personal relationship with us. God here offers us a glimpse of His magnificence, for in Christ all the fullness of God dwells.

I believe God is Love made personal; He is the embodiment of Love. Without the personal aspect, love means nothing. We may "love" other people with "Christian love", but when you know someone personally, love takes on an entirely different dimension. Too many of us have only a generic love for mankind, but they treat individual people very badly. Remember the Peanuts cartoon where Linus states, "I love mankind... It's people I can't stand!" I used to think that Lucy said this, because she was such a fussbudget. But it was Linus, who I always thought was the sensitive, philosophical one.

We all run the danger of missing the point by not seeing things in a personal light. We must strive to be more than just "good" people. We must secure our relationship with God. Otherwise He may be forced to say, "Depart from me, I know you not".