

## Stunted Gods

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*“No one is ever really at ease in facing what we call “life” and “death” without a religious faith. The trouble with many people today is that they have not found a God big enough for modern needs. While their experience of life has grown in a score of directions, and their mental horizons have been expanded to the point of bewilderment by world events and scientific discoveries, their ideas of God have remained largely static” (Your God Is Too Small, Phillips, p. 7).* The writer goes on to say that an adult Christian can never find satisfaction and contentment in worshipping a God who is limited by his “Sunday-school-age” perceptions about Him. *“And it will always be by such an effort that he either worships or serves a God who is really too small to command his adult loyalty and cooperation” (p. 7).*

What we see in many minds is an immature picture of God that stems more from religious immaturity, pageantry, and human tradition than deep, meaningful Bible understanding. We invent gods for ourselves that are convenient, manageable, and definable in a human sense – almost as if we are afraid to let ourselves depend on a God who is none of those things! It is this self-will that leads us to seek gratification or validation in our own small gods. The problem with this attitude is that it cannot dependably give us strength to deal with real life problems.

Do we really believe that God can stand up to all of our trials? That He is a rock and mountain? That He is above and all? *“If God is for us, who can be against us?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword?... But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:31-39).* So let us deconstruct some of the stunted gods that we put our trust in:

### Grand Old Man

*“It is said that some Sunday-school children were once asked to write down the ideas as to what God was like. The answers, with few exceptions, began something like this: ‘God is a very old gentleman living in heaven...’” (p. 23)* There may be no particular harm in this for a child whose superiors are always older than him (and God must be the oldest of all, right?), but the persistence of this idea into adulthood can be very damaging to a healthy understanding of God. We make the Almighty significantly less mighty by perceiving Him as a pudgy old man with a long beard and twinkling eyes (Santa Clause?). For thousands of years, in fact, in art, literature, humor, and pop culture, God is seen as the oldest, tallest man ever. There are a few problems with this idea, though:

- God’s existence is not measured in time, for He is not a linear beginning like we are. *“I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 1:8).* *“Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:57-58).* God cannot be categorized, for He has all the spiritual qualities of old age and youth at the same time.
- Making God into an old man is just one form of subconscious control. The elderly sometimes need more persistent care, are more frail in body, and can be less cognizant of their surroundings if they suffer from dementia. So we unintentionally weaken God by seeing Him as “old.”

- To see him as “old” also makes Him less applicable to modern day problems. God may be cute and sweet, like Santa Claus, but He is confused by things like social media, cell phones, and TV remotes with too many buttons. He has no real answers for homosexuality, drug abuse, complicated world politics and other modern problems
- The image we get of God in the Bible, however, is one of strength, omniscience, and power (**Revelation 1:12-16**).
- Thinking of God as an old man leads us to make the mistake of speaking to Him in “old-fashioned” language, using technical jargon in sermons, and treating Him like He is more the awesome God of our collective religious imagination and not the awesome God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, who is always relevant and seeks a relationship with all people, in every culture, for all time.