

HEARTBEATS - Staying Connected

7/16/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

American Christians believe in one of four different Gods, or really think about God in one of four different ways. Diane Butler Bass, in her book Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening, cites a study by Baylor University that examines the specific views of Americans regarding God. While approximately 92 percent of Americans say they believe in God, the Baylor researchers found that Americans really believe in four different Gods.

- Authoritarian God (31 percent) – God is a wrathful, sin-hating deity.
- Benevolent God (23 percent) – God is the forgiving friend of sinners, a peacemaker, and caring healer.
- Critical God (16 percent) – God is the bringer of justice who will make everything right and just in the end.
- Distant God (24 percent) – God is the cosmic creative force behind and beyond the natural universe.

The Baylor study looked at what people believe about God personally. It's interesting that many people have one view of God for themselves and their relationship with God, but a different one for others, particularly those who they consider "worse" than they. They may believe in a kinder God when it comes to their own sin, but a more judging and punishing God in relation to others whose behavior they perceive to be more sinful, or at least with regard to particular sins.

What most people believe about God is much more heavily influenced by what they have been taught in the congregations where they worship. Sadly, their view of God is determined much less by their own study of scripture. Rather than attending Bible study or spending personal time in study, they depend on what they are told in church, even when it may be in conflict with what the whole of scripture really says. Yet, personal study, Bible study in groups (though influenced by the one teaching), worship (also influence by the beliefs of the preacher), and devotions can all help in

discerning the truth about God, especially as presented by Jesus in the Gospels.

What do you believe about God? Which of the four Gods comes closest to what you personally think God is like? Is the God you believe in for yourself different than the God you believe in for others? How does your belief in God impact the way you live, how you interact with others, and share your faith? All of these are important questions for us to consider as we grow in our relationship with God and seek to be God's people in the world around us.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey