

Introduction

Back in 1972, Jim Croce wrote a song that I thoroughly enjoy titled *Don't Mess Around with Jim*. It's about a tough guy named Jim and an even tougher one named Slim. No one messed around with Jim, but unfortunately for Jim he messed around with Slim. Anyway, I just love the song's refrain, which goes like this: **"You don't tug on Superman's cape. You don't spit into the wind. You don't pull the mask off the old Lone Ranger. And you don't mess around with Jim** (which becomes "Slim" in the next refrain after Jim messes around with Slim)."

Whether Croce intended it or not, that refrain teaches us one of the foundational principles of human life. That principle is this, **"Don't spit into the wind; spit with it instead."** Turn to the passage I read earlier, Exodus 3:10-15, and let's learn what that's all about.

The Text

According to verses 1-9, Moses was tending his father-in-law's flock around Mt. Horeb, also called Mt. Sinai. Suddenly, God appeared to him in a bush that was blazing with fire but not being consumed.

God then spoke to him from the bush and, in verse 10, called him to go to Egypt and deliver the Israelites from their slavery there.

Moses objected in verse 11 that he was a nobody and thus unable to do such a remarkable thing. But God promised in verse 12 that He'd be with Him and give him the power to do it.

Moses then made an astute observation in verse 13. When he told the Israelites that the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was going to deliver them, they would ask him, **"What is His name?"** In the Old Testament, a name was synonymous with the nature or character of the person who bore it. Thus, when the Israelites would ask, **"What is His name?"** they would be asking, **"What has He revealed about Himself to you that He didn't reveal to our fathers, that should make us believe He'll deliver us?"**

That's the question they would ask and God supplied the answer in verses 14-15, "**I AM WHO I AM.**" That is in my view the most intriguing and dramatic statement in the entire Bible. So let's examine it.

The Initial Question of Human Life

The Hebrew word translated "**I am**" derives from the verb "**to be.**" It expresses the idea of "what is." It's about reality, in other words.

You all know what reality is. It's what actually exists or is so. In practical terms, it's what we can rely on. Let's go back to Croce's refrain. Superman and the Lone Ranger don't exist. We can't rely on them to rescue us in distress. But spit and wind do exist. We can rely on spit to soften our food and wind to cool us. That illustrates what reality is. It's what actually exists or is so. In practical terms, it's what we can rely on.

Reality, of course, is vital to us all. It's so vital in fact that it's the subject of what you might call "the initial question of human life." That question is this, "**What is real?**" Whether we're conscious of it or not, you and I routinely ask and answer that question in our everyday lives. And our answers to it dictate what we think, feel, and do.

About six months ago, for instance, my wife bought some chimes for our back porch. She asked the question, "**What is real?**" She also answered it, "**Wind is,**" which led her to buy the chimes.

There are much more affecting contexts of course. A 17-year old Christian's boyfriend dumped her when she wouldn't have sex with him. She asked the question, "**What is real?**" She also answered it, "**God's displeasure and venereal disease are,**" which led her to say "No."

You get my point. Whether we're conscious of it or not, our greatest and most practical concern in life is what is real. We routinely determine what is real, and then think, feel, and act on the basis of that.

The Dominant Reality of the Universe

Which brings us back to 3:14-15. These verses give us the ultimate

answer to the initial question of human life, **“What is real?”**

We see that answer in the clause, **“I AM WHO I AM.”** The double use of the word translated **“I AM”** connotes this, **“My being is based on my being.”** God is self-existent, in other words. He has the power of being within Himself. He exists totally from His own resources. He needs nothing outside Himself in order to exist and live. He has the possession of life, with consciousness and power to act, in Himself. Can He live without air? Yes! Can He live without sun? Yes! Can He live without anything in the universe? Yes! Can he live without anything period? Yes! That’s because He’s self-existent. He has the power of being within Himself. That’s what the clause, **“I AM WHO I AM”** connotes.

I can’t impress on you enough the significance of what I just said. If you mark in your Bible, highlight that clause because it’s the highest revelation of God’s nature in the Bible or anywhere else. That’s because self-existence is the one quality of His, more than any other, that separates Him from everything else that exists. Notice something in the last line of verse 14. God calls Himself **“I AM”** without qualification. He’s the only one who can do that. You and I can say, **“I am, if . . .”** I am if I have air or if I have water or if I have sun. But God can say **“I AM”** without any “ifs” at all. He is, therefore, an utterly different kind of reality than everything else that exists is.

That teaches us what the ultimate answer is to the initial question of human life. What is real? The ultimate answer is, **“God is.”** He’s the very ground of existence, the dominant reality of the universe.

Knowing and Accommodating Reality

“But so what?” you may be asking. **“What does any of this theology have to do with my real life and me?”** The answer is, **“It has everything to do with it!”** and here’s why.

How many of you remember learning the **“Don’t spit into the wind”** Principle – the hard way? I do. When I was a boy, an older friend of mine was riding me on the handlebars of his bike. We were going fast

against the wind when I suddenly spit right into it. You know what happened of course. It came right back on my friend and me.

Notice two things. First, I didn't know reality. I didn't comprehend the nature of spit and wind, specifically, that spit is light enough and wind is strong enough for that to happen. Second, I failed to accommodate myself to reality. I acted contrary to nature of spit and wind. The result was that my friend and I got wet.

That boyhood experience of mine illustrates a defining principle of our existence. For our lives to go well, we have to spit with the wind not into it. Calvin College professor Cornelius Platinga says it well:

“Wisdom in Scripture is, broadly speaking, the knowledge of God’s world and the knack of fitting oneself into it. To be wise is to know reality and then accommodate yourself to it. Folly is a stubborn swimming against the stream of the universe . . . spitting into the wind . . . coloring outside the lines.” That’s a profound paragraph. It contends that we need to spit with the wind not into it for things to go well, and reveals how. It’s by doing two things.

First, know reality. Everything that exists or is so has a nature or order that characterizes it. So, we comprehend the substance of that nature or order. To do so is to know reality. The only way to know reality of course is to study it. We read and listen to what reliable “people in the know”, especially the Biblical writers, teach about it. We also thoughtfully observe and analyze it ourselves.

We spit with the wind by doing a second thing. Accommodate ourselves to reality. On the negative side, we don't act *contrary to* the nature or order of things. On the positive side, we do act *according to* the nature or order of things. We identify what the practical implications of that nature or order are and live them out.

That then is how we spit with the wind and its applications are countless. You hate your wife's new hairstyle. Someone criticizes you. You get a credit card. You need to buy a car. Your boyfriend asks you to have sex. Your ten year old wants a cell phone. In all of those

scenarios and countless others, you have two options before you. First, spit into the wind. Don't know or don't accommodate yourself to reality. Things will go poorly if you don't. Second spit with the wind. Do know and accommodate yourself to reality. Things will go well if you do.

Several years ago, an angry person came into my office and yelled at me. I had two options when he did. Spit with the wind or into it. I chose to spit with it. First, I knew reality. Having studied anger, I comprehended its nature. Anger feeds on anger and justifies further anger. Responding with goodness throws angry people off balance and heaps coals of fire on their heads (makes them feel guilty). Anything that can be done with anger can be better done without it. And almost all anger is ego-involved and sinful. Second, I accommodated myself to reality. I acted according to the nature of anger. I identified what the practical implications of its nature are – stay calm and objectively address the subject matter of his complaint. I then lived out those implications. I stayed calm and objectively addressed the subject matter.

The moral of the story is clear. We need to spit with the wind not into it. We need to know and accommodate ourselves to reality. Things will go well if we do and poorly if we don't.

Knowing and Accommodating God

Now, if you've been following the flow of this message, you know where I'm headed next. It's back to 3:14-15 and the dominant of all realities – God. It's imperative that we spit with the wind and not into it when it comes to Him. We need to do two things.

First, know Him. As with all realities, we need to comprehend His nature – what His qualities are. The Bible, the created universe, and life in that universe, reveal at least 18 of those. So, we study and learn the substance of those 18 qualities. *The First Aim* study in our discipleship curriculum helps us do just that.

We spit with the wind when it comes to God by doing a second thing. Accommodate ourselves to Him. Knowing His nature, we act according

to it. We identify what the logical implications of His qualities are and then live them out. *The First Aim* study helps us do that as well.

That then is how spit with the wind when it comes to God. We know and accommodate ourselves to Him. We comprehend His nature and act according to it. Take God's self-existence as an example of what I mean.

First, know His self-existence. We study and learn the substance of it, which I already defined. He has the power of being within Himself, exists totally from His own resources, and so on.

Second, accommodate ourselves to His self-existence. Doing that requires that we identify its logical implications. I mentioned one of those. He is the ground of all existence and thus the dominant reality of the universe. That implication leads to another - human beings aren't in charge, aren't free to do as they wish to do and can do. Which leads to still another. When they insist on being in charge, they're usurping God's place. They're actually making themselves the "**I AM**" of verse 14. Those are the implications and once we identify them, we live them out. It's clear how we do. We abandon having our own way, fulfilling our own desires, as a rule of life. We embrace having God's way, fulfilling His desires, as a rule of life instead. A prosperous Christian couple, looking for a home, didn't buy a lavish one they wanted and explained why: "**We both loved it but based on 1 Timothy 6:8 didn't think God would approve.**" That couple is living out the implications of God's self-existence and so should we.

Conclusion

So there you have it - a foundational principle of human life that should direct the way we think, feel, and act. I'll never forget what my childhood friend told me as he was wiping my spit off his face: "**Don't ever spit into the wind again.**" That's sound advice in more ways than one and I close with it. Don't ever spit into the wind again. Spit with it instead. Know and accommodate yourself to reality, especially God. Things will go well for you if you do, poorly if you don't.