

The Overview Effect

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Traveling into space must be an amazing experience. Some astronauts have been deeply changed by seeing the earth from space. This change in thinking has been called the “Overview Effect. This term refers to “a cognitive shift in awareness reported by some astronauts during space flight, often while viewing the Earth from outer space.”

After seeing the earth from outer space, some have had an overwhelming sense of God’s existence. Others have realized the need to protect the earth’s environment and resources. Some felt struck by an awareness of our common humanity and the need for world peace.

Retired astronaut, Garret Reisman, was once asked about his experience with seeing the earth from outer space. Surprisingly, he was generally unimpressed with what he witnessed. He was careful not to disparage those who had a moving experience. Instead, he explained, “You shouldn’t have to strap into a rocket and blast off to know we are human beings.”

The Overview Effect impacts astronauts positively. We should have an awareness of God, the need to be good stewards of the earth, and a sense of our common humanity. Space travel may confirm these truths. Yet, Reisman’s sentiment has a Biblical resonance.

God Has Revealed Himself on Earth

God has revealed Himself to us in ways that are observable, accessible, and understandable. The apostle Paul taught a group of idolaters in Athens, Greece about the God who made the heavens and earth. Paul declared that the Creator is not far from us. He can be found if we look for Him.

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." (Acts 17:26-28).

We can find God by looking at His Son, Jesus. The Bible teaches us that God came to earth in the human form of Jesus. At the end of His life, Jesus spoke about returning to His Father’s house (John 14:1-10). The apostles were confused about Jesus’ destination and how they could join Him. Jesus told them that He was the way to His Father’s house. He and His Father were one. If they wanted to see God, they needed to see Jesus.

God came to earth in the form of Jesus to bring salvation from the penalty of sin. He showed us how our Creator envisioned humans living as His image-bearers. Jesus was the physical embodiment of self-giving love. He showed us what God can do for us if we believe and obey Him. If we seek Him, He has promised that we will find Him (Matt. 7:7-8)

Rejecting the Revelation of God

Surprisingly, people struggle to find God by believing in Jesus. Some bluntly reject Jesus. In his letter to the saints at Rome, Paul lovingly pled with his fellow Israelites to stop their rejection of Jesus. He used the Old Testament Scriptures to show how Jesus was anticipated for their salvation.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved (Rom. 10:4-10).

God brought salvation close to Israel and the rest of the world. They did not have to ascend to the heavens (strap into a rocket and blast off) to find salvation. They did not have to descend into the abyss of the sea to find it. God was near them. Salvation was near them: on their lips. Sadly, they would not say the words. They would not believe that Jesus was God, the way to the Father's house.

What's the Point?

1. God's revelation of Himself is enough. God has shown Himself to us in several forms. God's existence can be seen in Creation (Rom. 1:19-20). God has shown Himself in the face of Jesus (2 Cor. 4:6). God can be known through the Bible (Eph. 3:3-5). God can be found in the self-giving love of His children (Matt. 25:40; John 17:23). We do not have to strap into a rocket and blast off to believe in God.

2. God is near us. God can be found. He has taken steps towards us. He does not demand we perform some great feat of strength. He has done the hard work of bringing salvation to us through the self-giving love of Jesus.

There are times in life when we may feel alone. We may question God's presence and love. In those times, we must remember He is near us. If we move toward Him, He will move toward us (Jas. 4:8).

3. We must not push God away from us. If there is ever distance between us and God, it's because we have pushed Him away from us. We can ignore or reject His revelation. We can share in the sad legacy of the Israelites if we choose. Instead of pushing God away, we must reach out to Him and His Son. Salvation is near us. If we confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts, we can be saved by the One who God sent to us.