

Resources

- Volume 1 of *Systematic Theology* by Charles **Hodge**
- The Existence and Attributes of God* by Stephen **Charnock** (1853)
- Lectures in Systematic Theology* by Henry **Thiessen** (1949)
- The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. **Tozer** (1961)
- Knowing God* by J. I. **Packer** (1973)
- The Attributes of God* by Arthur **Pink** (1975)
- The God You Can Know* by Dan **DeHaan** (1982)
- God Is* by John **Bisagno** (1983)
- The Grandeur of God* by C. Samuel **Storms** (1984)
- Christian Theology* by Millard **Erickson** (1985)
- Basic Theology* by Charles **Ryrie** (1986)
- Volume 1 of *Integrative Theology* by Gordon **Lewis and Bruce Demarest** (1987)
- Trusting God* by Jerry **Bridges** (1988)
- The Moody Handbook of Theology* by Paul **Enns** (1989)
- Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine* by H. Wayne **House** (1992)
- Dr. Rolland **McCune's** "Systematic Theology I" class notes (1993)
- Volume 1 of *Systematic Theology* by Lewis Sperry **Chafer** (1993)
- Systematic Theology* by Wayne **Grudem** (1994)
- Volume 1 of *The Attributes of God* by A.W. **Tozer** (1997)
- A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* by Robert **Reymond** (1998)
- No One Like Him* by John **Feinberg** (2001)
- Volume 2 of *The Attributes of God* by A.W. **Tozer** (2001)
- The Doctrine of God* by John **Frame** (2002)
- Volume 1 of *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* by Rolland **McCune** (2008)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural citations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

Introduction to God's Attributes

We are about to embark on one of the most important and impactful journeys of our lives¹—a quest to understand and know God.² There is no greater pursuit. As God Himself says in Jeremiah 9:23-24: *Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me"* (cf. Hosea 6:6b).

It is generally agreed that the best way to learn about God is to study His attributes. Before studying individual attributes of God, however, we must first understand what an attribute is. In this lesson, we will define what an attribute is, attempt to classify God's attributes, and determine which, if any, of God's attributes is the most basic one.

What is an Attribute?

Simply put, an attribute is a word that describes what someone or something is like. We use the word, "attribute" (as a noun) when describing what God is like because attributes are words that we "attribute" (using the word as a verb) to God. To attribute is to ascribe or assign something to someone. We ascribe or assign various words to God that describe what He is like.³

God's attributes are not like the individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, which, when put together, make God what He is. Rather, each attribute completely describes what God is like. In other words, God is not part holy, part love, etc.; rather, He is completely holy

¹As Tozer (*Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 1) says: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us" and "... [T]he most portentous fact about any man is ... what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like" and "Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, 'What comes into your mind when you think about God?' we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man" and (p. 2) "I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God." In like manner, Christian counselor, Jim Binney once said: "In over 30 years of counseling, I have yet to find a single problem (spiritual, emotional, or behavioral) which does not have a root of origin, in part or in whole, in an unbiblical image of God."

²Because God is "incomprehensible," we will never (not even in glory) fully understand and know Him. This is because God is "infinite," while we are "finite." Though He can be truly known, He can never be totally known.

³A caveat is in order at this point. I am using the verb, "attribute" in a certain, restricted sense. Technically, we don't "attribute" anything to God. As Ryrie (p. 35) states: "God's perfections are known to us through revelation. Man does not attribute them to God; God reveals them to man."

and completely loving, etc.

God's attributes are intrinsic to His being. In other words, they are what make God what He is; He would cease to be God without them. They are essential, expressions of His very essence. God is what His attributes are. "Attributes are qualities that are inherent to a subject" (Ryrie, p. 35). "An attribute is a property which is intrinsic to its subject. It is that by which it is distinguished or identified" (Chafer, p. 190). "When we speak of the attributes of God, we are referring to those qualities of God which constitute what He is" (Erickson, p. 265). "The attributes of God are those distinguishing characteristics of the divine nature which are inseparable from the idea of God" (A. H. Strong, quoted in McCune, "Systematic Theology 1," p. 87). Attributes are not what God has, but what God is.

Classification of God's Attributes

In order to help us better understand God's attributes, it may be helpful to classify or categorize them. God's attributes can be divided into two distinct categories:

1. Attributes of greatness

Attributes of greatness are those attributes that God possesses exclusively. They are descriptive of God and God alone. Theologians sometimes refer to these as "incommunicable" because they cannot be communicated to (i.e., shared with) mankind. Examples include God's sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and holiness of being.

2. Attributes of goodness

Attributes of goodness are those attributes that God possesses to a perfect degree (God's attributes are sometimes also referred to as His "perfections") and that may be found to a limited degree in mankind. Theologians sometimes refer to these as "communicable" because they can be communicated to (i.e., shared with) mankind, though not to the same degree in which they are found in God. Examples include God's wisdom, holiness of behavior, love, mercy, grace, and justice.

The Supreme Attribute

Theologians have debated for centuries as to whether or not God has a supreme attribute, i.e., one that is more basic to His character than all the rest. Though God possesses all of His attributes to a perfect degree, there does seem to be one attribute that best characterizes the person we call God and that governs or regulates the other attributes. It is the attribute of holiness (see McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, pp. 249-252). See Isaiah 57:15a (cf. the end of Matthew 6:9). Holiness "may be said to be a transcendental attribute, that, as it were, runs through the rest, and casts lustre upon them. It is an attribute of attributes" (John Howe, quoted in Pink, p. 42). "Holiness occupies the foremost rank among the attributes of God" (Thiessen, p. 84).

As we will learn more fully in a later lesson, the basic idea behind the word, "holiness" is that of separation. God is separate from everything else in both a metaphysical (what He is/being) and moral (what He does/behavior) sense (thus, holiness is in actuality both an attribute of greatness and goodness). There is an infinitely vast chasm between God and man. This gap is commonly referred to as the Creator/creature distinction (cf. Psalm 50:21).⁴ As mentioned above, God's attributes of greatness are absolute—there is no human corollary to them. Furthermore, though God's attributes of goodness are reflected in man, the reflection is so dim that it almost defies comparison. Thus, fundamental to a basic understanding of God and His attributes is a proper understanding of the attribute of holiness.

Summation

What is an attribute? An attribute is a word that describes what someone or something is like. God's attributes can be classified into two categories: His attributes of greatness (not found in man) and His attributes of goodness (found in man, though to a very limited degree). The attribute of holiness is God's most basic attribute.

⁴“Forever God stands apart, in light unapproachable. He is as high above an archangel as above a caterpillar, for the gulf that separates the archangel from the caterpillar is but finite, while the gulf between God and the archangel is infinite. The caterpillar and the archangel, though far removed from each other in the scale of created things, are nevertheless one in that they are alike created. They both belong in the category of that-which-is-not-God and are separated from God by infinitude itself” (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 70).

God is Sovereign

Sovereignty Defined

The word, "sovereign" has as its root the verb, "reign," meaning to rule. The prefix, "sove" is derived from "super," meaning over or above. To say that God is sovereign is to say that He rules over all. He is the "God of gods" (Deuteronomy 10:17 and Psalm 136:2; cf. Psalm 135:5), the "King of kings" (1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14, and 19:16), and the "Lord of lords" (Deuteronomy 10:17, Psalm 136:3, 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14, and 19:16). As David exclaims in 1 Chronicles 29:11b-12a: "Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all" (see also 2 Chronicles 20:6, Psalm 22:28, 47:7-8, 99:1-2, and 103:19). God "is ruler over the realm of mankind" (Daniel 4:17, 25, and 32).

To put it in even simpler terms, God is the King of everything, the Lord of heaven and earth (Acts 17:24). By virtue of the fact that He has created all things, He has the right to rule over them (see Romans 9:14-21). God does as He pleases with His creation (see Job 23:13, 42:2, Psalm 2, 115:3, 135:6, Isaiah 46:9-11, Daniel 4:17, 25-26, 32, 35, and Ephesians 1:11).

Some Things Over Which God is Sovereign

1. The weather⁵ (see Job 36:32, 37:6, Jeremiah 10:13, Jonah 1:4, 4:8, and Mark 4:41; cf. Job 38:11, Psalm 104:9, and Jeremiah 5:22). As the hymn, I Sing the Mighty Power of God reads: "Clouds arise, and tempests blow, by order from Thy throne."
2. The animal kingdom (see Isaiah 46:11a, Jonah 1:17, 2:10, 4:7, and Matthew 10:29)
3. The plant kingdom (see Jonah 4:6)
4. Human life. Besides creating it (see Genesis 1:26f, 2:7, 21f, et. al.), God sustains it (see Job 34:14-15, Psalm 36:6, 104:29, Acts 17:25, and 28) and contains it (see Job 14:5 and Acts 17:26). Human life is in the hand of the heavenly Lord (see Job 12:10, Psalm 31:15a, 95:4, and Daniel 5:23).
5. Human lords (see Genesis 20:6, 1 Samuel 10:9, Ezra 1:2, 6:22, 7:27, Proverbs 21:1, Daniel 2:21, 4:17, 25, 32, John 19:11, and Romans 13:1). This is a case of the greater-to-the-lesser, i.e., if God is sovereign over the greatest of human beings, He is sovereign over all human beings. All human sovereigns are given their authority by the Sovereign and are merely instruments in His hand to accomplish His purposes (see Exodus 9:16//Romans 9:17, 2 Chronicles 36:22, Ezra 1:1//Isaiah 44:28-45:1, and Revelation 17:17).

⁵According to Mike Nichols (cited in Bridges, pp. 94-95), there are over 1,400 references to weather terminology in Scripture.

Some Implications of God's Sovereignty

1. **Submission.** Because God is sovereign, He has the right to tell us what we should do, when we should do it, where we should do it, how we should do it, with and to whom we should do it, and why we should do it. The only proper response to God's demands is unconditional obedience. This starts with surrendering oneself to God at salvation (lordship) and continues throughout one's Christian life by obeying the commands of Scripture.
2. **Security.** Because God is sovereign, we can rest secure. God controls all things. Nothing happens without His permission. There is no "maverick molecule" in the universe (McCune). This fact should give us great comfort. We don't have to worry about anything. It's all in His hands. His sovereignty is the source of the peace of God, the serenity of soul that knows that God is in control. Our only "concern" is to do what He tells us to do, leaving the results with Him.
3. **Celebration.** Because God is sovereign, we should worship Him. Notice how God's sovereignty is the basis for David's worship in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13. See also Psalm 47:6-7, 95:1-3, 97:1, and Revelation 19:6, upon which are based the words to the "Hallelujah" chorus. "The doctrine of God's sovereignty has very often appeared, an exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet doctrine to me: and absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God" (Jonathan Edwards, quoted in Storms, p. 29). As the song says, "Rejoice, the Lord is King!"

Some Objections to God's Sovereignty Answered

In spite of the fact that the Bible clearly teaches God's sovereignty, some have attempted to deny it or at least "water it down," finding it difficult to reconcile divine sovereignty with human freedom (How can a man be genuinely free if God is in complete control of him?) and the presence of evil (If God is both in control of everything and holy, why does evil exist?).

In response to the first, Ryrie (pp. 43-44) states: "Sovereignty/freedom forms an antinomy ('a contradiction between two apparently equally valid principles or between inferences correctly drawn from such principles'). Antinomies in the Bible, however, consist only of apparent contradictions, not ultimate ones. One can accept the truths of an antinomy and live with them, accepting by faith what cannot be reconciled; or one can try to harmonize the apparent contradictions in an antinomy which inevitably leads to overemphasizing one truth to the neglect or even denial of the other." Storms (pp. 177-178) makes the same point with a rhetorical question: "How is one to reconcile these apparently conflicting assertions? Should one accept both as equally inspired declarations and simply acquiesce to the resultant mystery, trusting in the sufficiency of an infinitely powerful and wise God to so constitute and orchestrate the created order such that both are true?" This is a "suprarational" matter, i.e., one that is above and beyond the human intellect's ability to grasp (suprarational ≠ irrational, however). Scripture affirms both truths (compare Jonah 1:15 with Jonah 2:3; Luke 22:22a with Luke 22:22b; Acts 2:23a with Acts 2:23b; Acts 4:27 with Acts 4:28; and Philippians 2:12 with Philippians 2:13).

Charles Spurgeon, when once asked about reconciling these two truths, famously replied: "I don't reconcile friends."

In response to the problem of evil, Tozer (*Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 110) writes: "In His sovereign wisdom God has permitted evil to exist in carefully restricted areas of His creation, a kind of fugitive outlaw whose activities are temporary and limited in scope. In doing this God has acted according to His infinite wisdom and goodness. More than that no one knows at present; and more than that no one needs to know." McCune ("Systematic Theology 1" class notes, p. 152) adds: "The whys and wherefores are simply left untouched by the Bible writers ... to delve philosophically or speculatively beyond what is written is not only futile but heretical (Romans 9:20a: Who are you who answers back to God?)." A final note: When considering the problem of evil, always remember that God Himself in the person of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, suffered the effects of evil to the ultimate degree on the Cross. The solution to the problem of evil is the Son.

"There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne. On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry [money house] to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth. And we proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter . . . then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust" (Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoted in Pink, pp. 32-33).

God is Omnipotent

Omnipotence Defined

The word, "omnipotence" is a compound, consisting of the prefix, "omni," meaning all, and the root, "potent," meaning powerful. Put the two together and you have the literal meaning of the term: God is omnipotent, that is, He is all-powerful. He is "God Almighty" (Genesis 17:1 and Revelation 19:6).⁶ God has all power (Psalm 62:11).⁷ His power is infinite, that is, without limit. He can do anything.

"I know that You can do all things." - Job 42:2

"Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for you." - Jeremiah 32:17 (see also Genesis 18:14, Numbers 11:23, Isaiah 59:1, and Jeremiah 32:27)

"For nothing will be impossible with God" - Luke 1:37 (see also Matthew 19:26//Mark 10:27//Luke 18:27 and Mark 14:36)

Technically-speaking, God cannot do anything. Because He is God, He cannot do anything that is inconsistent with His nature or character. For example, God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19, Titus 1:2, and Hebrews 6:18), nor can He deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). Furthermore, God only does what is consistent with His will. For reasons known only to Himself, God has chosen not to do certain things. For example, God could have given personality to a stone (Matthew 3:9). Jesus Christ, being God, could have summoned angels to rescue Him from the Cross (Matthew 26:53). "God can do all that He wills, but He will not do all that He can" (McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, p. 218). Thus, to say that God is omnipotent means that God can do anything consistent with His nature and will.

God's Omnipotence Displayed⁸

1. In Creation. See Jeremiah 32:17 and Romans 1:20. Imagine being able to instantly

⁶"Almighty" is used 56 times in Scripture, and all 56 refer to God (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 65; Ryrie, p. 40).

⁷Ultimately only God is powerful. All others are powerless. "Not a creature in the entire universe has an atom of power save what God delegates" (Pink, p. 47). Though God *gives* power, He does not *give away* power (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 66; emphasis his). God's power is incapable of being diminished. "All His acts are done without effort. He expends no energy that must be replenished" (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 67; cf. McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, p. 220). Nothing is "easier" or "harder" for God (Tozer, *The Attributes of God*, 2:84).

⁸Richard Watson (cited in Chafer, p. 212; emphasis his) reminds us "not to measure [God's] omnipotence by the actual displays of it which have been made. They are the *manifestations* of the principle, but not the *measure* of its capacity."

produce something out of nothing (*ex nihilo*; see Romans 4:17 and Hebrews 11:3) simply by uttering a command. This is what God did.⁹

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. - Psalm 33:6, 9 (see also Genesis 1 and 2)

Th' unwearied sun, from day to day,
Does his Creator's pow'r display,
And publishes to every land
The work of an Almighty hand.

(Joseph Addison, part of the words to the hymn,
"The Spacious Firmament on High")

I sing the mighty pow'r of God, that made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.

(Isaac Watts, part of the words to the hymn,
"I Sing the Mighty Power of God")

Note: As mentioned previously (see footnote 7), God's power is never diminished. When He finished creating, He did not rest because He was weary. God does not get tired (Isaiah 40:28). He rested on the seventh day, not because He was fatigued from creating, but because He was finished creating (see Genesis 2:2-3; cf. Exodus 20:8-11).

2. In preservation. God is powerful enough not only to create the universe, but also to sustain or preserve it. He keeps what He creates.

In Him all things hold together. - Colossians 1:17

And He [the Son] is the radiance of His [the Father's] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. - Hebrews 1:3

God's power to preserve the universe includes the power to sustain our very lives.¹⁰ Notice the words of Job:

⁹"The divine ability to bring a universe into existence out of nothing by volition is the grand manifestation of power" (Chafer, p. 210).

¹⁰Even though fourteen pounds of air pressure press upon every square inch of our bodies (Tozer, *The Attributes of God*, 2:76).

If He should determine to do so, If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust. - Job 34:14-15 (cf. Job 12:10, Psalm 36:6, 104:29, Isaiah 42:5, Daniel 5:23, Acts 17:25, and 28)

3. In salvation. Perhaps the greatest display of God's power occurs when He supernaturally changes the very nature of the human heart at the moment of salvation, transforming a rebellious, hell-bound sinner into a righteous, heaven-bound saint.

And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." - Matthew 19:23-26 (cf. the parallel passages of Mark 10:24-27 and Luke 18:24-27)

4. In sanctification. God is powerful enough not only to save a soul, but also eternally secure it. God keeps those He converts. Believers are preserved; they are kept by God. Believers also persevere; they keep the faith.

"And I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." - John 10:28-29

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance, which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. - 1 Peter 1:3-5 (see also Romans 8:30 and Philippians 1:6)

5. In resurrection. Just as God's power is able to raise the spiritual dead (see Ephesians 2:5), so His power is able to raise the physical dead.

Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. - 1 Corinthians 6:14 (see also 2 Corinthians 13:4 and Ephesians 1:19-20)

Some Implications of God's Omnipotence

1. Dependence. Because God is omnipotent, we are totally dependent on Him. Were it not for God, we could not exist physically (see Job 12:10, Psalm 36:6, 104:29, Isaiah 42:5, Daniel 5:23, Acts 17:25, and 28; cf. Matthew 6:11) or spiritually (Ephesians 2:8¹¹). He deserves all the credit for our physical and spiritual well-

¹¹Not surprisingly, the Greek verb translated "saved" in this verse is in the perfect tense. In Greek, the perfect tense describes a past action with continuing results. Because of God's

being.

2. Confidence. Because God is omnipotent, we need not fret over any threat. The saying, “I would if I could, but I can’t, so I won’t” does not apply to God. God has the ability to deliver us from any physical (see Psalm 27:1-3 and 46:1-3) or spiritual (see 1 Corinthians 10:13 and 1 John 4:4) threat. “If God were stunted in might and had a limit to His strength we might well despair. But seeing that He is clothed with omnipotence, no prayer is too hard for Him to answer, no need too great for Him to supply, no passion too strong for Him to subdue; no temptation too powerful for Him to deliver from, no misery too deep for Him to relieve” (Pink, p. 51).
3. Reverence. Because God is omnipotent, we should fear Him. God is awesome in power. The only proper response to His awesomeness is awe or reverence. This was the response of the Psalmist when describing God’s power in Creation: *Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast* (Psalm 33:8-9). “To openly defy Him who is clothed with omnipotence, who can rend us in pieces or cast us into Hell any moment He pleases, is the very height of insanity” (Pink, p. 51). God’s power displayed in creation is all the more impressive in light of such passages as Job 26:14 and Habakkuk 3:4. Let us, with David, say: “Be exalted, O Lord, in Your strength; We will sing and praise Your power” (Psalm 21:13; cf. Daniel 2:20).

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed

When through the woods, and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees
When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur
And see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

(part of the words to the hymn, “How Great Thou Art”)

grace, we have been saved from sin’s penalty (justification), are being saved from sin’s power (sanctification), and will one day be saved from sin’s presence (glorification).

God is Omniscient

Omniscience Defined

The word, "omniscience" is a compound, consisting of the prefix, "omni," meaning all, and the root, "science," meaning knowledge. Put the two together and you have the literal meaning of the term: God is omniscient, that is, He is all-knowing. He "knows all things" (1 John 3:20; cf. John 21:17); "His understanding is infinite¹²" (Psalm 147:5; cf. Psalm 139:6, Isaiah 55:8-9, and Romans 11:33); He is "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16). God has all knowledge; thus, He is the source of all the knowledge possessed by mankind (see Daniel 2:21).

God does not learn or discover (Isaiah 40:13-14//Romans 11:34).¹³ Neither does He forget. He has always known all things—past, present, and future¹⁴ (Isaiah 42:9, 46:10a, and 48:3)—instantaneously. God knows all things in "one indivisible, simultaneous act of intuition" (McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, p. 222).¹⁵ God's knowledge even includes possibilities. In other words, not only does God know what will happen, but also what could happen. Here are two examples:

Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down." Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will surrender you." Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit.

- 1 Samuel 23:10-13

Then He [Jesus] began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom

¹²This means that God has no IQ, as Intelligence Quotient is a finite measurement.

¹³Well has it been said: "Has it ever occurred to you that it has never occurred to God?"

¹⁴God foreknows the future because He foreordained it (see, for example, Acts 2:23).

¹⁵"[God] knows all that can be known. And this He knows instantly and with a fullness of perfection that includes every possible item of knowledge concerning everything that exists or could have existed anywhere in the universe at any time in the past or that may exist in the centuries or ages yet unborn" (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 56).

which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day." - Matthew 11:20-21, 23

Some Things God Knows

1. The number and names of the stars. *He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them* (Psalm 147:4; cf. Isaiah 40:26).¹⁶
2. The number of hairs on our heads. *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered* (Matthew 10:30). FYI: It has been estimated that the number of hairs on the average redhead is 80,000, on the average brunette 100,000, and on the average blond 120,000 (insert your own joke here ☺).
3. Man's thoughts, words, actions, and motives. *O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all* (Psalm 139:1-4). See also Deuteronomy 31:21, 1 Kings 8:39, 1 Chronicles 28:9, Job 31:4, 34:21, Proverbs 15:11, Ezekiel 11:5, Luke 16:15, John 2:24-25, and Acts 1:24. God knows everything we think, say, and do, and why we think what we think, say what we say, and do what we do.

Some Implications of God's Omniscience

"The doctrine of divine omniscience is immeasurably relevant to the day-to-day experience of the believer. If ever there existed an opportunity to shatter the silly notion that theology is barren and devoid of practical benefits, this is it" (Storms, p. 82).

1. Motivation. Because God is omniscient, we are accountable to Him. *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account* (Hebrews 4:13 in the NIV; see also Psalm 11:4, 33:13-15, Proverbs 5:21, 15:3, and Jeremiah 32:19). Accountability for the Christian will ultimately take place at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). Because of such accountability, we should be motivated to forsake sin and pursue righteousness (1 Timothy 6:11 and 2 Timothy 2:22). *I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, For all my ways are before You* (Psalm 119:168).

Thus, there is both a negative and a positive aspect to God's omniscience. Negatively, God sees all the wickedness that we do (consider, for example, Cain's murder of Abel in Genesis 4 and Achan's theft in Joshua 7) and judges us

¹⁶How many stars are there? It has been estimated that on a clear, moonless night about 3,000 stars are visible with the unaided eye. A small telescope will increase this number to about 100,000, stars that can be seen in our corner of the Milky Way galaxy, a galaxy that contains approximately 100 billion stars, with 100 billion such galaxies in God's universe, resulting in ten billion trillion stars. It has also been estimated that there are 1 trillion stars for every individual on planet earth.

accordingly (1 Samuel 2:3, Psalm 44:20-21, 90:8, 94:4-9, Isaiah 29:15, Jeremiah 16:17, 17:9-10, Hosea 7:2, and Revelation 2:23). This is a sobering thought. As Tozer (*Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 57) states: "That God knows each person through and through can be a cause of shaking fear to the man that has something to hide—some unforsaken sin, some secret crime committed against man or God." Stephen Charnock (1:495) adds: "Temptations have no encouragement to come near him that is constantly armed with the thoughts that his sin is booked in God's omniscience." Positively, however, God also sees all the good that we do (Isaiah 40:27) and rewards us accordingly (Hebrews 6:10).

2. Invitation. Because God is omniscient, we should invite His scrutiny. As we saw earlier, David begins Psalm 139 by declaring God's omniscience. Notice how he ends the very same Psalm: *Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way* (Psalm 139:23-24; cf. Psalm 26:2). David realized that he could not possibly hide anything from God. Consequently, he invited God to "search him out" and reveal his shortcomings.
3. Consolation. God's omniscience is not only a cause for concern, but also for comfort. God is looking at us, but He is also looking out for us. As the songwriter has written: "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me" (see Matthew 10:29-31). See also Exodus 3:7 and 9, 2 Chronicles 16:9a, Psalm 1:6a, 33:18-19, 34:15, and Revelation 2:9. God knows our needs (Matthew 6:8 and 32). "To us who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope that is set before us in the gospel, how unutterably sweet is the knowledge that our Heavenly Father knows us completely. No talebearer can inform on us, no enemy can make an accusation stick; no forgotten skeleton can come tumbling out of some hidden closet to abash us and expose our past; no unsuspected weakness in our characters can come to light to turn God away from us, since He knew us utterly before we knew Him and called us to Himself in the full knowledge of everything that was against us" (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 57).

God is Omnipresent

Omnipresence Defined

The word, "omnipresence" is a compound, consisting of the prefix, "omni," meaning all, and the root, "present". God is all-present, everywhere, ubiquitous. Being infinite (unlimited), God is not limited by space (1 Kings 8:27 and 2 Chronicles 2:6).¹⁷ His entire presence (God does not "parcel Himself out") fills the entirety of the universe at every moment. He is all there everywhere.

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You. - Psalm 139:7-12

"Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD. - Jeremiah 23:24

Though God is fully present everywhere in a *quantitative* sense, He is not so in a *qualitative* sense.¹⁸ For example, His presence in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple (Psalm 76:2 and 80:1) was qualitatively different than His presence elsewhere. Likewise, His presence in the saved (Romans 8:9a, 1 Corinthians 6:19, and Galatians 2:20)¹⁹ is qualitatively different from His presence in the unsaved (Romans 8:9b; cf. Isaiah 59:2 and Proverbs 15:29a). In like manner, His presence in Heaven (Deuteronomy 26:15, 1 Kings 8:30, Psalm 2:4, 33:13-14, 113:5, 115:3, 123:1, and Matthew 6:9) is qualitatively different from His presence elsewhere.²⁰

¹⁷God is not as big as the universe, nor is He even bigger than the universe. In fact, He does not have "size." As Grudem (p. 175) states: "We should try to avoid thinking of God in terms of size or spatial dimensions. God is a being who exists *without* size or dimensions in space. In fact, before God created the universe, there was no "where" or space. But God still was! This fact makes us realize that God relates to space in a far different way than we do or than any created thing does. He exists as a kind of being that is far different and far greater than we can imagine."

¹⁸God is equally present everywhere "ontologically," but not so "morally," "spiritually," or "ethically" (Feinberg, p. 250).

¹⁹"For God is never so far off, as even to be near. He is within. Our spirit is the home He holds most dear. To think of Him by our side is almost as untrue As to remove His shrine beyond those skies of starry blue. So all the while I thought myself homeless, forlorn, and weary, Missing my joy, I walked the earth, myself God's sanctuary" (Henry Thiessen, source unknown).

²⁰In a sense God is "more present" in Heaven than elsewhere. "God is present in a special way in heaven God manifests his presence more fully in heaven than elsewhere" (Grudem, p. 176). His presence is "more intense and more intimate" in Heaven (Frame, p. 581). While God is metaphysically present in Hell (Revelation 14:10), He is not morally so.

On Immanence and Transcendence

Corollaries of omnipresence are immanence and transcendence. God is immanent, that is, He is present within His creation. However, He is also transcendent, that is, He is present above, beyond, or apart from His creation. Jeremiah 23:23 speaks of both: "Am I a God who is near," declares the LORD, "And not a God far off?" An overemphasis on either of these truths leads to theological error. To emphasize God's immanence to the neglect of His transcendence leads to pantheism (the belief that the universe is god, not that God is a person who created the universe and is, thus, separate from it).²¹ To emphasize God's transcendence to the neglect of His immanence leads to deism (the belief that God is so separate from His creation that He is not personally involved in it).

Some Implications of God's Omnipresence

1. God's omnipresence is a cause for concern. When we sin, we sin in His sight (2 Samuel 12:9, Psalm 51:4, and Isaiah 65:12). Because God is omnipresent, we cannot escape from Him.²² "*Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?*" declares the LORD (Jeremiah 23:24; see also Job 34:21-22, Amos 9:2-4, and Obadiah 4). Like David in Psalm 139, we must acknowledge that we cannot hide or run away from God. Adam and Eve tried (Genesis 3:8), as did Jonah (Jonah 1:3). Rather than trying to run *away* from God, we should find ourselves running *to* Him.²³ Unlike the teacher, God does not leave the room.
2. God's omnipresence is a comfort (Psalm 73:23, 139:10, and Jeremiah 15:20b). "How transporting the thought, that we cannot go where God is not!" (John Dick, cited in Chafer, p. 222). God does not "have any difficulty dealing with needs and problems which arise in widely differing locations at the same time. He does not, however, move from one place to another as a sort of divine superman who flies at

²¹According to pantheism, God - the world = 0; according to the Bible, God - the world = God (Storms, p. 88).

²²"How terrible should the thoughts of this attribute be to sinners! How foolish it is to imagine any hiding-place from the incomprehensible God, who fills and contains all things, and is present in every point of the world. When men have shut the door, and made all darkness within, to meditate or commit a crime, they cannot in the most intricate recesses be sheltered from the presence of God" (Charnock, pp. 397-398).

²³"There is no place at all whither you may flee. Will you flee from him? Flee unto him" (source unknown, quoted in Grudem, p. 177).

infinite speed. Rather, he simply has access to the whole of creation at all times” (Erickson, p. 274). If you are a believer, not only is God *near* you, He’s *in* you (1 Corinthians 6:19-20—be careful where you take Him)! This should be a source of great comfort, especially in times of difficulty (see Psalm 16:8, 23:4, 46:1, and 2 Timothy 4:17). *“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:20). *“I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,”* so that we confidently say, *“THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?”* (Hebrews 13:5-6). There is no need to fear when the Lord is near (see also Genesis 26:24, Deuteronomy 31:6, 8, Joshua 1:5-6, 9, 1 Chronicles 28:20, Isaiah 41:10, 43:1-2, 5, and Jeremiah 46:28). He is present to protect. Also, there’s no such thing as a prayer that “doesn’t make it past the ceiling”—God is below the ceiling.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh
And thy Maker is not by;
Think not thou canst weep a tear
And thy Maker is not near.

(part of poem by William Blake, quoted in Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 58)

The story has been told of an atheist who once wrote, “God is nowhere.” His young daughter saw what he wrote and slightly rearranged the letters to read instead, “God is now here.” According to the story, God used this incident to bring this atheistic father to faith in Christ.

God is Holy

"Holy, Holy, Holy²⁴, is the LORD of hosts." (Isaiah 6:3; cf. Revelation 4:8)

What is Holiness?

The basic idea of the word, "holy" is separation. Something is holy when it is set apart for sacred use (e.g., "holy Scriptures" in Romans 1:2, "sacred writings" in 2 Timothy 3:15, and "holy Bible"; "holy ground" in Exodus 3:5, as well as Joshua 5:15's "the place where you are standing is holy"; the "holy city," Jerusalem; the "holy land," Israel; holy days/holidays; and Christians as "saints," or holy ones, in Romans 1:7 and 1 Corinthians 1:2) To say that God is holy means that He is separate from everything else. He is unique, distinct, special, one-of-a-kind, in a class by Himself. This is true in two respects:

1. God is separate from everything else in a *metaphysical* sense, or in His being or essence, or in relation to Creation. There is no other being like God. As Exodus 15:11 declares: *"Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?"* (see also 1 Samuel 2:2, Psalm 77:13, and Isaiah 40:25, as well as 2 Samuel 7:22, Psalm 71:19, 86:8, 89:6-8a, 113:5, and Isaiah 46:9). God's transcendent holiness is the basis for what has been called the Creator/creature distinction. God's essence or being transcends that of His creation to an infinite degree. Any comparison that is made between God and us is simply a finite representation of what is in reality an infinite chasm. God is so great that He defies comparison (Psalm 89:6, Isaiah 40:18, and 46:5). God's holiness of being is vividly seen by the sinless seraphim of Isaiah 6, who cover themselves in God's presence (verse 2), then cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy" (verse 3).
2. God is separate from everything else in a *moral* sense, or in His behavior or expression, or in relation to corruption. All of creation (unfallen angels excepted) is tainted by sin to varying degrees (see Romans 8:19-22). God, however, is totally set apart from sin. "[God] is, as it were, allergic to sin and evil" (Erickson, p. 285). As 1 John 1:5 declares: *God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all* (see also Habakkuk 1:13a; cf. Isaiah 33:15's "shuts His eyes from looking upon evil"). Holiness in God involves not only the absence of evil, but also the presence of good. Negatively, God never does anything wrong; positively, He always does everything right. He is perfectly pure.

²⁴This "threepeat" concerning God's holiness (sometimes called the "trisagion," from the Greek word for holy, *hagios*) is a Hebraic way of emphasizing the superlative of something, much like our great, greater, greatest. According to Frame (p. 28), "In the Bible, holiness is the only divine attribute proclaimed in threefold repetition." This is in keeping with the suggestion (see the introductory lesson to this study) that holiness is God's fundamental attribute.

Some Implications of God's Holiness

1. Confession. Because God is holy, we should acknowledge our unholiness. The reason why we do not fully understand just how sinful we are is because we do not fully understand just how holy God is (“*You thought that I was just like you,*” Psalm 50:21) or we forget that God is the standard²⁵ (Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, Job 4:17, Matthew 5:48, and 1 Peter 1:15-16). When one begins to comprehend just how holy God is, his response should be similar to that of Isaiah and Peter:

"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).

But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken (Luke 5:8-9).

2. Imitation. Because God is holy, we should be holy ourselves. Remember, this includes not only the absence of *vice*, but also the presence of *virtue* (sin is not just a matter of *commission*, but also of *omission*, James 4:17). *But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY"* (1 Peter 1:15-16; cf. Leviticus 11:44-45 and 19:2, as well as Matthew 5:48). God is perfectly pure. We, as believers, should be characterized by “the relentless pursuit of perfection,” confident that, even though we will not attain the goal in this life²⁶, we will in the next: *Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14; cf. 2 Corinthians 7:1). Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:2-3).* Sanctification is the process by which the believer becomes progressively set apart from sin and to righteousness.

²⁵“When one measures one’s holiness, not against the standard of oneself or of other humans, but against God, the need for a complete change of moral and spiritual condition becomes apparent” (Erickson, p. 286).

²⁶“Proper conduct can be tested by the simple question, Is it holy? This is the believer’s standard. While he does not always measure up to it, he must never compromise it” (Ryrie, p. 39).

3. Glorification. Because God is holy, we should hallow Him. Whatever the attribute, we should glorify God simply for who He is (not just for what He does). This is especially true when it comes to the attribute of God's holiness. *“Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy (Revelation 15:4; cf. Psalm 30:4, 99:3, 5, 9, and 103:1).* We can glorify God for His holiness particularly through singing (Exodus 15:1a, 11, Revelation 15:3a, and 4a; see such songs as “Holy, Holy, Holy”) and prayer (1 Samuel 2:1a, 2, and Matthew 6:9).

Holiness and Separation
(2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, et. al.)

God's holiness is the theological basis behind the doctrine and practice known as separation. Because God is holy and, thus, separate from sin, we, His children, should take measures to separate ourselves from sin (not necessarily from sinners). Separation takes place on two levels: corporately (or ecclesiastically) and personally. Corporately, we as a church have a responsibility to separate from any individual or group that practices theological compromise (liberals) or that associates with one that does (evangelicals). Personally, we as individual believers have a responsibility to separate from evil by not only resisting temptations to sin, but also by developing personal standards of conduct designed to prevent us and/or those around us from being tempted to sin in the first place.

God is Loving

Towards a Definition of Love

Love is one of the most misunderstood words in the English language. According to many, love is a strong like, a warm, fuzzy feeling you get when you are with someone you are interested in. To others, love is lust, mere physical attraction. To yet others, it is license, permitting a person to pursue whatever pleases them. According to Scripture, however, love is something altogether different.

Rather than a feeling, love is a choice; rather than an emotion, it is an act of the will²⁷ (Hosea 14:4 and Matthew 5:44). In other words, love is not some passive feeling that suddenly and inexplicably comes over you. Rather, it is an active choice that is purposefully and thoughtfully made. Love is not something you "fall into"; instead, it is something you "jump into." All of this does not imply, however, that love is devoid of feeling. Feelings are a natural by-product of the choice to love, but they are not its basis. And rather than being permissive, love is protective.

Love is not strong like, lust, or license. It is loss, selfless sacrifice. Love is that in God that moves Him to do what is best for His creatures. Because God is loving, He does (action) what is best for us (selfless). "‘This is true love to any one,’ said Tillotson, ‘to do the best for him we can.’ This is what God does for those he loves—the best he can" (Packer, p. 126).

The Declaration of God’s Love

God is love (1 John 4:8 and 16). He is "the God of love" (2 Corinthians 13:11).

Love is part of God’s very nature or essence. It is essential to His being. It is impossible for God to be unloving. If He was, He would not be God. Everything God does can be characterized as loving.

Descriptions of God’s Love

1. **God’s love is unconditional.** God's love for the believer comes with "no strings attached." He does not love us only if or when we meet certain criteria. He loves us regardless of who we are or what we do. He loves us because He has chosen to love us. Period. This was the basis of His choice of the nation of Israel: "*The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you*" (Deuteronomy 7:7-8; cf. Hosea 14:4). It is also the basis of His choice of believers (Ephesians 1:4-5; cf. 1 John 4:19). God’s love cannot be earned, nor can it be forfeited.

²⁷"Love is a settled purpose of the will involving the whole person in seeking the well-being of others" (Gordon Lewis, cited in McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, p. 255). Thiessen (p. 86) describes love as "a rational and voluntary affection."

2. God's love is unusual. After Christ stilled the storm in Matthew 8:26, the disciples exclaimed: *“What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”* (Matthew 8:27). The same Greek adjective, translated “what kind of” in Matthew 8:27, is used to describe God's love for believers in 1 John 3:1: *See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God.* The love of Christ for us “surpasses (literally “to throw beyond”) knowledge” (Ephesians 3:19). “The New Testament writers had to introduce what was virtually a new Greek word, *agape*, to express the love of God as they knew it” (Packer, p. 124). What makes God’s love so unusual is that He showed it not to the lovely—His “friends” (John 15:13), the “righteous” (Romans 5:7a), or the “good” (Romans 5:7b), but to the unlovely—the “ungodly” (Romans 5:6), “sinners” (Romans 5:8), His “enemies” (Romans 5:10), those who did not love Him (1 John 4:10). “God loved what is the antithesis of himself; this is its marvel and greatness” (John Murray, quoted in Storms, p. 144). No wonder why Psalm 145:8 calls God’s lovingkindness “great,” Ephesians 2:4 calls God’s love “great,” and Charles Wesley (in his beloved hymn, “And Can It Be?”) calls His love “amazing!”

3. God's love is unstoppable. *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*²⁸ (Romans 8:35 and 38-39; cf. Psalm 103:17a and Jeremiah 31:3). His love is a loyal love.²⁹

The Demonstration of God’s Love

God demonstrates His love for us in a variety of ways. The supreme expression (Romans 8:32) of His love, however, was the sending of His Son to die for our sins. *“For God so loved the world*³⁰*, that He gave His only begotten Son”* (John 3:16). *But God*

²⁸“We are constantly tempted to look within ourselves to seek to find some reason why God should love us. Such searching is, of course, usually discouraging. We usually find within ourselves reasons why we think God should *not* love us. Such searching is also unbiblical. The Bible is quite clear that God does not look within us for a reason to love us. He loves us because we are in Christ Jesus. When He looks at us, He does not look at us as ‘stand alone’ Christians, resplendent in our own good works, even good works as Christians. Rather, as He looks at us, He sees us united to His beloved Son, clothed in His righteousness. He loves us, not because we are lovely in ourselves, but because we are in Christ” (Bridges, p. 143; emphasis his).

²⁹The loyal love of God is seen by the Hebrew word, *hesed*, found some 245 times in the Old Testament.

³⁰“In John 3:16 God’s love in sending the Lord Jesus is to be admired not because it is extended to so big a thing as the world, but to so bad a thing; not to so many people, as to such wicked people. Nevertheless elsewhere John can speak of ‘the *whole* world’ (1 John 2:2), thus bringing bigness and badness together” (D.A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, p. 17; emphasis his).

demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). See also Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 5:2, 25, 1 John 3:16, 4:9-10, and Revelation 1:5. “Almost invariably the New Testament Epistles expound God’s love for us by reference to the cross. To eliminate the death of Christ for sinners would eviscerate the very heart of divine love as portrayed in the New Testament” (Carl F. H. Henry, quoted in Storms, p. 132). “[Christ] was bound to the cross not by the nails of the military executioner, but by the ‘cords of love’” (John Eadie, quoted in Storms, p. 141). “Calvary is the supreme demonstration of Divine love. Whenever you are tempted to doubt the love of God, Christian reader, go back to Calvary” (Pink, p. 81).

“Settled at the Cross” by the Steve Pettit Evangelistic Team

How I love to read the Book You wrote for me –
You loved the world so much You gave Your Son.
Written there in crimson, You told me I'm forgiven.
It is done, it is done!
So if You never speak another word of blessing,
And the silence leaves me with a sense of loss,
I'll remember when my heart begins to question,
Any doubt that You love me was settled at the cross.

I would be the first to admit I don't deserve
The kind of favor You have always shown.
But You don't have to tell me,
You proved how much You love me,
And I know, I still know
That if You never speak another word of blessing,
And the silence leaves me with a sense of loss,
I'll remember when my heart begins to question,
Any doubt that You love me was settled at the cross.

Not only was God’s love demonstrated in the accomplishment of redemption, but also in its application, as Ephesians 2:4-5 attests: *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*

The Difference God’s Love Makes in Our Lives

1. Because God is loving, we should praise Him. *Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise you* (Psalm 63:3). See also the many other verses in the Old Testament that call upon us to praise God for His *hesed*, or loyal love (1 Chronicles 16:34, Psalm 107:1, 8, 15, 21, 31, 118:1, 29, 136:1-3, and 26).

2. Because God is loving, He disciplines us. *"FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES"* (Hebrews 12:6; cf. Proverbs 3:11-12 and Revelation 3:19). Contrary to popular thinking, love is not permissive³¹; rather, it is protective. A permissive parent (one who tends to avoid disciplining his child for sinful behavior) does not truly love his child (Proverbs 13:24). A parent who truly loves his child will discipline him for sinful behavior in order to prevent that child from persisting in such behavior and suffering the consequences that go along with it (Proverbs 19:18 and 23:13-14). Likewise, God disciplines us in order to protect us from sin and its consequences. Though painful, divine discipline is for our ultimate good (Hebrews 12:10-11).
3. Because God is loving, we ought to be loving. *"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you"* (John 15:12). *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another* (1 John 4:11). See also Matthew 5:43-48, John 13:34, Ephesians 5:1-2, 25, 1 John 3:16, and 4:19. Because they are the only ones who truly understand what love is, Christians ought to be the most loving people on the face of the earth (John 13:35). Our lives must be characterized by love—doing what is best for others.
4. Because God loves us, we can rest secure in His love. If God has chosen to make you a special object of His love, nothing (nothing you do or anyone else does) can prevent Him from loving you, nor stop Him from loving you. God is "for" you (Psalm 118:6 and Romans 8:31). Believers are beloved by God (see Romans 1:7, Colossians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, and 2 Thessalonians 2:13³²). Meditate long and hard on Romans 8:31-39.

³¹God's love is not permissive. The heresy of universalism (the belief that, when all is said and done, God will give everyone a free pass to heaven) misunderstands God's love. God's love is a holy love. "Holiness is the track on which the engine of love must run" (A. H. Strong, quoted in McCune, "Systematic Theology 1," p. 109). God punishes every sin—the sin of the unbeliever in Hell, the sin of the believer on the Cross.

³²The verbals in Colossians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, and 2 Thessalonians 2:13 are in the perfect tense in the Greek, indicative of a past, point-in-time action, with ongoing result ("having been and continuing to be beloved" is the idea), reflective of the fact that God's love for the believer is continuous.

God is Merciful

What is Mercy?

In Luke 18, Jesus taught a parable (“an earthly story with a heavenly meaning”) about a Pharisee and a tax collector. In the parable, the Pharisee proudly boasted about his “righteousness,” while the tax collector humbly confessed his sinfulness. The tax collector's plea was: “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” (Luke 18:13). This man understood that, because of his sin, he deserved nothing but God's displeasure. However, he also understood that God is merciful (Exodus 34:6, Deuteronomy 4:31, Psalm 86:15, 145:8, and 2 Corinthians 1:3), that is, He does not always give us what we deserve (Ezra 9:13 and Psalm 103:10).³³ Therefore, the tax collector appealed to God's mercy, begging God not to give him what he deserved. As a result, God mercifully withheld His judgment (Luke 18:14).

Like the tax collector, we deserve nothing but God's judgment for our sin. Romans 6:23 tells us that “the wages of sin is death” (cf. Romans 5:12 and James 1:15). Because we are sinners, we deserve death, both physical and spiritual. Every breath we take is a testament to God's mercy (see Lamentations 3:22 in the NIV, KJV, and NASB margin; cf. Nehemiah 9:31). Because of our sin, we do not deserve to live another day (Luke 13:1-5). Yet, God in His mercy does not give us what we deserve. Even more amazing is God's mercy in salvation. All of us deserve to spend eternity in Hell because of our sin, yet God mercifully spares some this fate (Ephesians 2:4, Titus 3:5, and 1 Peter 1:3).³⁴ No wonder God's mercy is so often called “great” (such as in 2 Samuel 24:14, Nehemiah 9:31, Isaiah 54:7, and 1 Peter 1:3), as well as “rich” (Ephesians 2:4)!

Related Concepts (see Exodus 34:6, Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 86:15, 103:8, 11-13, and 145:8)

1. Grace. Whereas mercy may be defined as not getting the bad one deserves, grace may be defined as getting the good one does not deserve. In other words, mercy is the withholding of deserved cursing (such as death and Hell), while grace is the bestowing of undeserved blessing (such as life and Heaven). Grace goes one step beyond mercy. We will examine God's grace more thoroughly in our next lesson.
2. Pity and compassion. Pity may be understood as the emotional aspect of mercy, while compassion may be viewed as its volitional aspect. Because God is merciful, He “feels sorry” for us in our miserable condition (see Psalm 103:13-14). His compassion is what causes Him to do something about it. In His mercy, He relieves

³³Mercy has also been defined as “[God's] goodness manifested towards those who are in misery or distress” (Thiessen, p. 96) and “God's goodness to those in distress or deserving judgment” (Lewis and Demarest, p. 222).

³⁴“That any are saved at all is, however, the amazing thing. If God gave to all what they deserve, none would be saved. Everyone would be lost and condemned” (Erickson, p. 295).

the misery caused by our sin. *The Lord is full of compassion and is merciful* (James 5:11; cf. Lamentations 3:22).

3. Longsuffering. To be longsuffering is to be patient with people. God in His mercy patiently "puts up with" sinners (Romans 9:22, 1 Timothy 1:16, 1 Peter 3:20, and 2 Peter 3:9). He is "slow to anger" (Exodus 34:6, et. al.). It is God's longsuffering that prevents Him from immediately unleashing His justice on sinners.
4. Forgiveness. God in His mercy forgives or pardons those who have offended His holiness by their sin. *If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You* (Psalm 130:3-4a; cf. Isaiah 55:7).

Some Implications of God's Mercy

1. Because God is merciful, we should be merciful. Believers are to make every effort to reflect God's attributes of goodness. Thus, we should be merciful because God is merciful (Luke 6:36). Jesus emphasized this very point in a parable He taught in Matthew 18:23-35. Though shown great mercy by his master, the wicked servant showed no mercy to a fellow servant. In like manner, we have been shown great mercy by our Master. May we respond by freely showing mercy to others. *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you* (Ephesians 4:32; see also Colossians 3:13, as well as Luke 10:37).
2. Because God is merciful, we should be grateful. Being a recipient of God's mercy is a privilege, not a right (Exodus 33:19//Romans 9:15 and 18). God in His mercy unconditionally saves some, sparing them from the calamitous consequences of their sin.³⁵ If this fact does not produce in the believer an "attitude of gratitude," nothing will. "We should be amazed that we suffer so little for the consequences of our sin" (DeHaan, *The God You Can Know*, p. 56).³⁶ The question is not: Why do

³⁵The "calamitous consequences of sin" are seen most vividly in the Tribulation and in Hell.

³⁶Jonathan Edwards once wrote: "How far less [are] the greatest afflictions that we meet with in this world ... than we have deserved The greatest outward troubles and calamities that we meet with ... must needs appear very little things to the misery which we have deserved ... A man may meet with very great losses ... his cattle may die, his corn may be blasted, his barn may be burnt down and all the goods consumed, and he may be brought from a comfortable living to a poor, low, stricken state. This is very hard to bear, but alas, how little reason have such to complain if they do but consider how little this is, compared with that eternal destruction that we have been informed of." In like manner, Lisa Beamer, widow of Todd Beamer, one of the 40 individuals killed by terrorists as a result of the demise of United Flight 93 on September 11, 2001, has said: "You think you deserve a happy life and get angry when it doesn't happen like that. In fact you are a sinner and deserve only death. The fact that God has offered you hope of eternal life is amazing! You should be overwhelmed with joy and gratitude" (quoted in the September 11, 2002 issue of *Newsweek*, p. 42).

bad things happen to good people? There are not any good people (Mark 10:18 and Romans 3:10-12). The question is: Why does anything good ever happen to bad people, i.e., anyone? The answer: Because God is merciful. Glorify God for His mercy (Romans 15:9).

3. Because God is merciful, we should be humble. Like the tax collector in the parable referred to earlier, we should be humbled by the thought of God's mercy. The more we fully understand what mercy is all about, the more humbled we should be that God has chosen to shed it upon us so abundantly. Thomas Hooker, one of the Puritans, was told by his friends while on his deathbed: "Brother Hooker, you are going to receive your reward shortly." Hooker's response was this: "No, no, I go to receive mercy" (DeHaan, *The God You Can Know*, p. 58).
4. Because God is merciful, we should be prayerful. God stands ready, in accordance with His nature, to manifest His mercy to those in misery. All we need to do is cry out for it (see Hebrews 4:16, as well as Luke 17:13, 18:13, and 38).

“When . . . we children of the shadows reach at last our home in the light,
we shall have a thousand strings to our harps, but the sweetest may well
be the one tuned to sound forth most perfectly the mercy of God.”

(Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 90)

God is Gracious

Declarations of God's Grace

Gracious is the LORD.

(Psalm 116:5; cf. Exodus 34:6, Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 86:15, 103:8, 111:4, 145:8, Joel 2:13, and 1 Peter 5:10)

Definitions of God's Grace

God's grace is His unearned (Romans 11:6) and undeserved (Romans 3:23-24 and 6:23) favor shown towards sinners. Because God is gracious, He sometimes gives us what we do not deserve.³⁷

Displays of God's Grace

1. In society. God's grace is displayed in both a general and specific sense. It is displayed towards all men in general ("common grace"³⁸) and towards believers in particular ("special grace").³⁹ God in His common grace:
 - 1) Creates and sustains physical life (Acts 17:25—"He Himself gives to all people life and breath"; cf. Isaiah 42:5)
 - 2) Acts kindly towards His creatures (Psalm 145:9—"The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works"; Matthew 5:45—"causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"; Luke 6:35—"He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men"; cf. Psalm 65:9-13, 104:10-30, 145:15-16, and Acts 14:17)
 - 3) Restrains sin and its effects⁴⁰ through such things as human government

³⁷Other definitions include: "[God's] sovereign, unmerited favor, given to those who deserve his wrath" (Frame, p. 426); "God's free action in behalf of those who are meritless" (Chafer, p. 206); "God's goodness manifested toward the ill-deserving" (Thiessen, p. 87); and "The unmerited or undeserving favor of God to those who are under condemnation" (Enns, p. 196).

³⁸John Murray (quoted in Storms, pp. 119-120) defines common grace as "every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God."

³⁹"The biblical way of putting this distinction would be to say that God is good to all in some ways and to some in all ways" (Packer, p. 162).

⁴⁰"God places restraint upon the workings of human depravity and thus prevents the unholy affections and principles of men from manifesting all the potentialities inherent in them. He

(through its laws and law enforcement) and the presence of the Holy Spirit in believers (Matthew 5:13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7⁴¹)

- 4) Gives unsaved men the ability to do cultural or civic good (2 Kings 10:29-31, Luke 6:32-34, Acts 28:2, and Romans 2:14-15)⁴²
2. In salvation. Just as God graciously gives physical life, so He graciously gives spiritual life. *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God* (Ephesians 2:4-8⁴³; see also Acts 15:11, 18:27, Romans 3:24, 5:15, 17, Ephesians 1:7, 2 Timothy 1:9, and Titus 3:7).
3. In sanctification. Not only is salvation “all of grace”⁴⁴, but so is sanctification. Just as God graciously sustains physical life, so He graciously sustains spiritual life. The ability and desire to do right after one is saved is a gracious gift from God (Ephesians 2:10 and Philippians 2:12-13). *But by the grace of God I am what I am,*

prevents depravity from bursting forth in all its vehemence and violence” (John Murray, quoted in Storms, p. 120).

⁴¹This is one of the reasons why the Tribulation will be so devastating—as believers are removed from the earth at the Rapture, so will the Holy Spirit’s restraining influence.

⁴²Though God enables unsaved men to do “good” in a cultural or civic sense, such “goodness” is not meritorious, i.e., it does not in any way earn God’s favor (Proverbs 15:8a//21:27 and Isaiah 64:6), the reason being that unsaved men never do “good” for the right reason, to glorify God. The Westminster Confession of Faith (cited in Frame, p. 434) states: “Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others: yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God”

⁴³God’s grace as set forth in this passage is magnified all the more in light of the groundwork Paul lays in verses 1-3, showing how we were spiritually dead (verse 1), spiritually dominated (verses 2-3a), and spiritually doomed (verse 3b). BUT GOD (verse 4)! “It is precisely because people today have lost sight of the depths of human depravity that they think so little of divine grace. What makes Paul’s declaration that we are ‘saved by grace’ so significant is his earlier declaration that we were ‘dead’ in trespasses and sins” (Storms, p. 124).

⁴⁴The title of a book on salvation by Charles Spurgeon.

and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me (1 Corinthians 15:10). It [the grace of God] teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age (Titus 2:12, NIV).⁴⁵ "I need not torment myself with the fear that my faith may fail; as grace led me to faith in the first place, so grace will keep me believing to the end. Faith, both in its origin and continuance, is a gift of grace" (Packer, p. 136). "'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home" (from stanza 3 of "Amazing Grace").

4. In service. Paul understood that it was only by God's grace that he was in the ministry. The ability⁴⁶ and opportunity to serve in the local church is a great privilege! *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:7-8, NIV; cf. Romans 1:5, 15:15-16, 1 Corinthians 3:10, Galatians 2:9, and Ephesians 3:2).*
5. In suffering. According to Paul, suffering for the cause of Christ is a privilege: *For to you it has been granted⁴⁷ for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Philippians 1:29; cf. Acts 5:41). And when we do suffer, it is God's grace that sustains us: . . . [T]here was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). [God] gives grace to the afflicted (Proverbs 3:34b).*

The Difference God's Grace Makes in Our Lives

1. Because God is gracious, we should be gracious. Believers are expected to emulate God's attributes of goodness, graciousness being one of them. Remembering how gracious God has been to us, His enemies (Romans 5:10), we should be gracious to everyone, including our enemies (see Matthew 5:43-48).
2. Because God is gracious, we should be humble. There is nothing that we have done,

⁴⁵Sadly, there are some who believe that God's grace gives the believer a license to sin (see Romans 6:14-15 and Jude 4). However, Romans 6:1-2 and Titus 2:11-12 clearly teach that grace and godliness are inseparable.

⁴⁶"Spiritual gifts" are just that—gifts! "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us" (Romans 12:6; cf. Ephesians 4:7 and 1 Peter 4:10). One of the New Testament words used to describe spiritual gifts is *charismata*, the root of which is *charis*, the Greek word for grace.

⁴⁷The Greek verb translated "it has been granted" in Philippians 1:29 is *charizomai*, the noun form of which is *charis*, the Greek word for grace.

are doing, or ever will do to earn God's grace. ". . . *What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Remember, it is by the grace of God that we are what we are (1 Corinthians 15:10). "To the degree that we are aware of the grace of God in our lives, to that degree we are walking humbly before God" (DeHaan, p. 59).

3. Because God is gracious, we should be grateful. God is not obligated to show grace to anyone (Exodus 33:19)⁴⁸. If He was, it would no longer be grace (Romans 11:6).⁴⁹ Grace and gratitude go hand-in-hand.⁵⁰ "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).
4. Because God is gracious, we should praise Him. Ephesians 1:3-14 is a hymn of praise for God's grace in salvation.⁵¹ Some of our most beloved hymns have God's grace as their focus (*Amazing Grace*⁵²; *Grace! 'Tis a Charming Sound; Only a Sinner; Wonderful Grace of Jesus*). Praise God, His grace is rich (Ephesians 1:7), surpassingly so (Ephesians 2:7), and abundant (Romans 5:17 and 20)!
5. Because God is gracious, we should be motivated to serve Him more, not less, fervently. Some discourage teaching and preaching on God's grace, fearing it will squelch commitment, service, etc. However, several passages in Scripture indicate otherwise. Consider, once again, Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:10: "*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; **but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me***" (see also Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 2:12-13, Colossians 1:29, and Titus 2:11-12).

⁴⁸"Only when it is seen that what decides each man's destiny is whether or not God resolves to save him from his sins, and that this is a decision which God need not make in any single case, can one begin to grasp the biblical view of grace" (Packer, p. 132).

⁴⁹"Although God *is* gracious in His eternal being, He need not *be* gracious or shower His grace upon anyone. If grace were at any time an *obligation* of God, it would cease to be grace" (Storms, p. 126).

⁵⁰"It has been said that in the New Testament doctrine is grace, and ethics is gratitude; and something is wrong with any form of Christianity in which, experientially and practically, this saying is not being verified" (Packer, p. 137).

⁵¹The structure of the hymn is as follows: Stanza 1 focusing on God the Father's role in salvation (verses 3-5), chorus (verse 6), Stanza 2 focusing on God the Son's role in salvation (verses 7-11), chorus (verse 12), Stanza 3 focusing of God the Holy Spirit's role in salvation (verses 13-14a), chorus (verse 14b).

⁵²John Newton, who wrote the hymn, *Amazing Grace* once said: "If I ever reach heaven I expect to find three wonders there: First, to meet some I had not thought to see there. Second, to miss some I had thought to meet there. And third, the greatest wonder of all, to find myself there!"

Great God of wonders! all thy ways
Display the attributes divine;
But countless acts of pardoning grace
Beyond thine other wonders shine:
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?

In wonder lost, with trembling joy,
We take the pardon of our God;
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,
A pardon bought with Jesu's blood:
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?

O may this strange, this matchless grace,
This God-like miracle of love,
Fill the wide earth with grateful praise,
As now it fills the choirs above!
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?

(Samuel Davies, recited in Packer, p. 134)

God is Wise

Declarations of God's Wisdom

God is *wise in heart* (Job 9:4). With Him is wisdom (Job 12:13). Wisdom belongs to Him (Daniel 2:20). He is *the only wise God* (Romans 16:27). See also Romans 11:33 and Colossians 2:3.⁵³

The Distinction Between Knowledge and Wisdom

What exactly does it mean to say that God is wise? In order to answer this question, we must first distinguish between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is the possession/*apprehension* of facts. Wisdom goes a step further. Wisdom is the practice/*application* of facts. Knowledge is to know, while wisdom is to know how. Knowledge describes *mental/intellectual* ability, wisdom *moral/ethical* ability. One can possess a lot of knowledge and yet be unwise. Likewise, one can have relatively little knowledge and yet be wise.⁵⁴ This does not imply, however, that knowledge is unimportant. We should make every effort to acquire as much knowledge as possible, for it is only by possessing knowledge that we can make proper use of it.⁵⁵

God is both omniscient and wise. He perfectly knows all facts and how to perfectly use them (Romans 11:33). Being omnipotent, He has the ability to perfectly use them (see Job 9:4, 12:13, and Daniel 2:20, where God's wisdom is conjoined with His power).

Describing and Defining God's Wisdom

According to McCune (*A Systematic Theology*, p. 233), "God applies His knowledge in such a way that the best means are employed to achieve the highest ends in order to glorify Himself the most." Tozer (*Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 60) likewise describes God's wisdom as "the ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means," as does Thiessen (p. 82): "Wisdom is the intelligence of God displayed in the choice of the highest ends of the fittest means for the accomplishment of those ends." In other words, God knows the best destinations and the best directions to reach such destinations.

A simple definition of God's wisdom is: God makes no mistakes. *As for God, His way is [perfect]* (Psalm 18:30). Everything He does is perfect. Nothing God does can be

⁵³God's wisdom is sometimes referred to as His "omnisapience" ("omni," all + "sapience," wisdom).

⁵⁴"The Bible's assessment of a smart person without God is 'fool' (1 Cor 1:20), and the humblest, least literate, untutored, but pious person is, in God's eyes, truly wise. How reversed we usually have it!" (*Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice* by Robert Alden, p. 22).

⁵⁵Charnock (1:508) reminds: "Men may have knowledge without wisdom, but not wisdom without knowledge."

improved upon. Nothing can be added to or taken away from what God does in order to make it better (Ecclesiastes 3:14). Thus, AT EVERY MOMENT, IT IS THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS (McCune).

I know God makes no mistakes.
He leads in every path I take
along the way that's leading me to home.
Though at times my heart would break,
There's a purpose in every change He makes;
That others would see my life and know that God makes no mistakes.
(Kim Moore, "God Makes No Mistakes")

His way is perfect. His way is perfect.
Though I don't understand His wise and loving plan,
His way is perfect. His way is perfect.
Take my life and make a vessel purified.
God makes no mistakes; His way is best.
(Betsy Kistler, "His Way is Perfect")

Displays of God's Wisdom

1. God's wisdom is displayed in creation. *O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all* (Psalm 104:24; cf. Psalm 136:5, Proverbs 3:19, 8:27-30, Jeremiah 10:12, and 51:15).
2. God's wisdom is displayed in conversion. *So that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 3:10). See also Romans 11:33, regarding which Grudem (p. 193) states: "At the end of eleven chapters of reflection on the wisdom of God's plan of redemption, Paul bursts forth into spontaneous praise: 'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!' (Romans 11:33)."

The Designs of God's Wisdom

In describing God's wisdom earlier in this lesson, many mentioned that God in His wisdom devises the highest or perfect ends. What are these ends?

1. God's glory. *I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him* (Ecclesiastes 3:14). The primary reason why God does anything is to bring honor and glory to Himself. Being God, He has no other choice but to do so. He would be unjust were He not to give Himself the honor and glory He so richly deserves.⁵⁶ ... [T]o Him are all things. To Him be the glory

⁵⁶"God must choose his own glory ahead of all else. As the only infinite being, this is what he must do. To put something else in the primary place would in effect be a case of idolatry"

forever. Amen (Romans 11:36).

2. Our good. *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose* (Romans 8:28). God does not do things *to us*, so much as He does things *for us*.

"All God's acts are done in perfect wisdom, first for His own glory, and then for the highest good of the greatest number for the longest time" (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 60). One example of this two-fold design of God's wisdom is seen in the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11). Obviously, Lazarus's resurrection was very beneficial to several individuals (especially to Lazarus). Notice, however, the ultimate reason for this great miracle, as declared by Christ prior to the fact: "*This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it*" (John 11:4; cf. John 9:3). The greatest example of this two-fold design is the Cross.

The Difference God's Wisdom Makes in Our Lives

1. Because God is wise, we should revere and rejoice in Him. *To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen* (Romans 16:27). See also Ecclesiastes 3:14, Daniel 2:20, Romans 11:33-36, Revelation 5:12, and 7:12.

<p>O rejoice in the Lord. He makes no mistake. He knoweth the end of each path that I take. For when I am tried and purified, I shall come forth as gold. (Ron Hamilton, "Rejoice in the Lord," based on Job 23:10)</p>

2. Because God is wise, we should not rip Him. Whenever we consider what God does, we must remember that we are looking at such from a very limited perspective. Being finite, we do not know all that God knows. Furthermore, we are fallen, unable to rightly reason. Therefore, we should be careful not to question God's character by accusing Him of being unwise in His dealings with us (the reason why God takes the sin of complaining so seriously—see 1 Corinthians 10:10). No matter how "bad" something might seem to us, it is in reality a good thing. Though we may not immediately (if ever) understand how, God is being glorified and man is being benefitted by it.
3. Because God is wise, we should rest in Him. Just as a child must trust the wisdom of his parents to know and do what is best for him, so must we trust the wisdom of our Heavenly Father to know and do what is best for us. Rather than trying to wrest the controls of our lives away from God, or wrestle with Him over the control of our lives, we should rest in His control. See Proverbs 3:5-6 and 1

(Erickson, p. 288).

Peter 4:19.⁵⁷

Tho' the pathway before you uncertain may be,
Trust the Lord no good thing to withhold back from thee;
He is perfect in wisdom and faithful to bless.
Trust His Word; in His time He will give you His best.
(Joe Zichterian, "Wait On the Lord")

4. Because God is wise, we should reflect Him. Believers are expected to emulate God's attributes of goodness, wisdom being one of them. In order to be wise, we must go to God, who gives it (Daniel 2:21 and James 1:5). This means that we must:
- 1) First go to God for salvation (see Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10, as well as 2 Timothy 3:15).
 - 2) Then go to God in supplication (as did Solomon in 1 Kings 3; cf. James 1:5).
 - 3) And also go to God in Scripture (see Proverbs 2:6, as well as Psalm 119:98-100).

⁵⁷A very helpful book in this regard is *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts* by Jerry Bridges.

God is Just

Exclamations

All His ways are just; A God . . . without injustice, Righteous and upright is He (Deuteronomy 32:4; cf. Genesis 18:25, Psalm 11:7, 92:15, 97:2, 119:137, 129:4, 145:17, Isaiah 45:21, Daniel 4:37, 9:7, 14, John 17:25, Romans 9:14, Revelation 15:3, and 16:5).

Explanation

In Leviticus 19:35-36, God said to the Israelites through Moses: “*You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin*” (cf. Deuteronomy 25:13-16, Proverbs 11:1, 16:11, 20:10, and 23). A “just” unit of measurement was one that was right or fair because it conformed to a standard. To say that God is just is to say that He is right or fair because He conforms to a standard. The standard is God Himself. “Everything in the universe is good to the degree it conforms to the nature of God and evil as it fails to do so” (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 87). There is no standard of righteousness or fairness external to God to which He must conform. If there was, it would be God.⁵⁸ Since God is the standard, everything God does is right or fair. God does not do things because they are right; they are right because He does them. God is never unrighteous or unfair in His dealings, though it may sometimes seem so to us. However, our perspective is limited. Asaph realized this truth in Psalm 73. From Asaph's limited perspective, it seemed like God was being unjust in allowing the wicked to prosper⁵⁹ (verses 3-12) and the righteous to suffer (verses 13-14). However, once he understood God's unlimited perspective, his doubts were dispelled (verses 16-28).

Execution

Because God is just, He is a righteous judge (Psalm 7:11 and 2 Timothy 4:8), dealing justly with men, punishing or rewarding them in accordance with what they deserve (unless He decides to act in mercy by not giving them what they deserve or in grace by giving them what they do not deserve).⁶⁰ See Psalm 9:4, 8, 96:10, 13, 98:9, Isaiah 11:4, Acts 17:31, Romans 2:5, 2 Thessalonians 1:5, 1 Peter 2:23, Revelation 16:7, and 19:2.

⁵⁸“It is sometimes said, ‘Justice requires God to do this,’ referring to some act we know He will perform. This is an error of thinking as well as of speaking, for it postulates a principle of justice outside of God which compels Him to act in a certain way. Of course there is no such principle. If there were it would be superior to God” (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 87).

⁵⁹“In the past we often heard the slogan ‘crime does not pay.’ But crime frequently does pay, and sometimes quite handsomely! Leaders in organized crime often accumulate huge amounts of earthly wealth” (Erickson, p. 289).

⁶⁰Because God is just, every sin must be punished. God cannot overlook sin. Either the sinner himself pays the price (in Hell) or Jesus pays the price for him (on the Cross). See Romans 3:21-26.

There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil . . . but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good (Romans 2:9-10).

☹ God executes His justice by punishing disobedience. Theologians call this God's "retributive justice" (or His punitive justice). *Woe to the wicked! It will go badly with him, For what he deserves will be done to him (Isaiah 3:11).* "As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Your truth. Therefore the LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice" (Daniel 9:13-14; cf. Nehemiah 9:33, Galatians 6:8a, and Revelation 16:4-7). God is the standard; since God is perfect, the standard He demands is perfection (Matthew 5:48 and 1 Peter 1:15-16; cf. James 2:10).⁶¹ Since we fail to meet this standard (Romans 3:23), God is perfectly just in punishing us for our sin to the ultimate degree.⁶²

⁶¹Do you have to be perfect to go to heaven? YES! "The righteousness He requires is the righteousness His righteousness requires Him to require." The only way to Heaven is through Christ (John 14:6, Acts 4:12, and 1 Timothy 2:5), for only Christ met the standard of perfection demanded by God (Matthew 3:15). At the moment of salvation, Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer (placed on his account), causing God to declare the believer righteous positionally (justification), providing passage into Heaven. See Romans 5:19b and 2 Corinthians 5:21b.

⁶²The "ultimate degree" is eternity in Hell. The reason why Hell is such a stumbling block to so many is because so many minimize the severity of sin. The punishment for a crime is proportionate to the value of the victim. For example, killing a human warrants a stiffer penalty than killing an animal (not that killing an animal is a crime), because humans are made in God's image (Genesis 1:27, 9:6, and James 3:9), while animals are not. Because sin's "victim" is God (Genesis 39:9, 1 Samuel 12:23, 2 Samuel 12:13, Psalm 51:4, Luke 15:18, and Acts 5:4), and God is infinite, sin's punishment must be infinite. "... [T]he infinite horrors of hell are intended by God to be a vivid demonstration of the infinite value of his glory which sinners have belittled ... hell is the clearest testimony to the infiniteness of the sin of failing to glorify God" (John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!*, p. 127). "A sin against the infinite God takes on proportions of infinity; it requires infinite retribution. The response must be commensurate with the offense ... Every sin, great or small by human standards, is against God (Ps 51:4), and therefore accrues infinite demerit. A finite being is required to pay this endless guilt in an unending amount of time. Only in this way are the perfect equity and retributive justice of God upheld. Anything other than eternal punishment slurs the character of God" (Rolland McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, p. 295). Furthermore, since the unbeliever's rebellion against God will never end, neither can God's punishment for it. "... [I]n hell the sins of the unrepentant go on for ever and ever. They do not become righteous in hell. They are given over to the corruption of their nature so that they continue rebelling and deserving eternal punishment eternally" (John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!*, p. 128).

- ☺ God executes His justice by rewarding obedience. Theologians call this God's "remunerative justice." *Say to the righteous that it will go well with them, For they will eat the fruit of their actions* (Isaiah 3:10). *For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints* (Hebrews 6:10; cf. 1 Samuel 26:23, Psalm 18:24, 58:11, Matthew 25:21, Galatians 6:8b, and Ephesians 6:8). When we think of God's justice, we usually think of it only in negative terms, i.e., God punishing disobedience. However, His justice also has a positive side. Because God is just, He rewards obedience. If He did not, He would not be just. Here's the incredible thing: Though He is the One who works within us to give us the desire and ability to do right (Philippians 2:13), we get the blessing that results from doing right (Psalm 19:11, 119:1-2, Luke 11:28, and James 1:25).

When does God execute His justice? Sometimes, God chooses to execute His justice upon men during their earthly lifetimes. This was especially true with the Jews during the theocracy. In the theocracy, there was an immediate cause-and-effect relationship between actions and their consequences. The effects of our actions, however, are often far removed from their causes. Nevertheless, the consequences usually come sometime during our earthly existence. However, God is not obligated to execute His justice upon an individual while that individual is still alive on this earth. He has all eternity to execute His justice. This means that even though all wrongs may not be righted in this life, they will be eventually. God's justice demands an eventual reconciliation between men's actions and their consequences. As Erickson (p. 289) states: "The justice of God must not be evaluated on a short-term basis. Within this life it will often be incomplete or imperfect. Earthly life is not all there is, however. There is a life beyond, and in the scope of all eternity, God's justice will be complete." *For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil* (Ecclesiastes 12:14). "Pay Day—Someday"⁶³ (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9). For the believer, God's justice will be meted out at the "Judgment Seat of Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:10); for the unbeliever, at the "Great White Throne Judgment" (Revelation 20:11-15).

Exhortations

1. Because God is just, we should do right, not wrong. From a negative standpoint, God's justice should motivate us to forsake sin, as we realize that God will punish every act of disobedience. Dread of His wrath should result in not doing wrong. "If we know that retributive judgment faces us at the end of the road, we shall not live as otherwise we would" (Packer, p. 143). From a positive standpoint, God's justice should motivate us to pursue righteousness, as we realize that God will also reward every act of obedience (Galatians 6:9). Desire for His reward should result in doing right.

⁶³The title of a famous sermon preached by Robert G. Lee (a sermon that he preached an incredible 1,275 times).

2. Because God is just, we should not seek revenge. Because God is just, He will eventually right all wrongs (see, for example, 2 Thessalonians 1:6). This is His responsibility, not ours. No matter how tempted to do so, we should never take justice into our own hands. *Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord* (Romans 12:19; cf. Proverbs 20:22).
3. Because God is just, we should repent and receive. As pointed out in footnote 60, because God is just, each individual's debt of sin will ultimately be paid, either in Hell or on the Cross. It is only by repentant faith in Jesus Christ that the payment is transferred from the sinner to the Savior. So, repent from sin and receive Him in order to avert the righteous wrath of God and receive the righteousness of God's Son.
4. Because God is just, we should replicate His justice. Believers are expected to emulate God's attributes of goodness, justice being one of them. Every effort should be made to rightly respond to right by rightly rewarding it and to wrong by rightly retributing it.

God is Infinite

A Declaration

“Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? “They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? “Its measure is longer than the earth And broader than the sea (Job 11:7-9).

A Definition

When we say that God is infinite we mean that He is not finite, or limited. Thus, He is unlimited (and unlimitable⁶⁴).

A Description

God is not limited by time, being eternal; therefore, He cannot be described with time measurements (such as years). God is not limited by space, being omnipresent and immense⁶⁵ (see 1 Kings 8:27//2 Chronicles 2:6); therefore, He cannot be described with space measurements (such as height and weight). God is unlimited in knowledge, being omniscient (see Psalm 147:5); therefore, He cannot be described with intelligence measurements (such as IQ). God is unlimited in power, being omnipotent; therefore, He cannot be described with strength measurements (such as how much He can bench press). God is unlimited in authority, being sovereign. Only God is infinite; everything else is finite. There is an infinite gap between God and everything else.⁶⁶

A Difference God’s Infinitude Makes in Our Lives

Because God is infinite, there is no limit to His love for us. As Charles Wesley wrote in his hymn, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”: “Pure, unbounded love Thou art.” And as Fanny Crosby wrote in her hymn, “Praise Him! Praise Him!”: “Love unbounded, wonderful, deep and strong.”

⁶⁴God does have some limitations, but they are self-imposed. He is limited by His nature and will.

⁶⁵God in His omnipresence fills the entirety of the universe with the entirety of His being at every moment (He is spatially immanent), while in His immensity He is not limited to the universe (He is spatially transcendent).

⁶⁶“The difference between God’s being and ours is more than the difference between the sun and a candle, more than the difference between the ocean and a raindrop, more than the difference between the arctic ice cap and a snowflake, more than the difference between the universe and the room we are sitting in: God’s being is *qualitatively different*” (Grudem, p. 162; emphasis his).

God is Incomprehensible

Declarations

“God thunders with His voice wondrously, Doing great things which we cannot comprehend (Job 37:5; cf. Judges 13:18⁶⁷, Job 5:9, 9:10, 11:7-9, Psalm 40:5, 139:6, 145:3, Isaiah 40:28, 55:8-9, Romans 11:33-34, and Ephesians 3:19).

A Definition

When we say that God is incomprehensible, we mean that He cannot be completely comprehended.

A Description

Though God cannot be fully known, He can be truly known (see Jeremiah 9:24 and Romans 1:19).⁶⁸ “Human understanding is incapable of *comprehending* God completely, but it is able to *apprehend* Him sufficiently” (Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 185; emphasis theirs). Eternal existence in heaven will help us know God better, but never exhaustively, for the finite will never fully comprehend the infinite. “God is a subject of study that we will never master” (Grudem, p. 151). The only conduits of revelation we have about God, the world (Psalm 19:1-6) and the Word (Psalm 19:7-11), are finite and, therefore, incapable of comprehensively communicating the greatness of God.⁶⁹

A Difference God’s Incomprehensibility Makes in Our Lives

Because God is incomprehensible, He is worthy of our worship (see Romans 11:33f). “If I could fully understand God, I could not worship Him, as He would not be as great as some of the people closest to me that I don’t always fully understand” (Charles Wood). “The point is not to completely understand God, but to worship Him. Let the very fact that you cannot know Him fully lead you to praise Him for His infiniteness and grandeur” (Francis Chan).

⁶⁷“Wonderful” in this verse means incomprehensible (see NASB marginal note; NIV: “beyond understanding”). See also Isaiah 9:6.

⁶⁸“Agnosticism” erroneously contends that God is incapable of being known. McCune (“Systematic Theology 1,” p. 105) quips: “Those who say God is unknowable claim a great deal of knowledge about Him!”

⁶⁹“When we try to imagine what God is like we must of necessity use that-which-is-not-God as the raw material for our minds to work on; hence whatever we visualize God to be, He is not, for we have constructed our image out of that which He has made and what He has made is not God” (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 8).

God is Immutable

Declarations

For I, the LORD, do not change (Malachi 3:6; cf. Exodus 3:14's "I AM," Psalm 102:26-27//Hebrews 1:11-12, Hebrews 13:8, and James 1:17).

A Definition

When we say that God is immutable, we mean that He is not mutable, or changeable. He is unchanging and unchangeable.

A Description

God is always the same. He does not change, nor can He. He is perfect.⁷⁰ "He cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse" (Pink, p. 37). God will always be what He has always been. God neither grows nor decays (McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, p. 236). God's person is unchanging (2 Timothy 2:13), the claims of "process theology" notwithstanding.⁷¹ God's plans are unchanging (Psalm 33:11, Proverbs 19:21, Isaiah 14:24, 46:10-11, and Hebrews 6:17).⁷² God's promises are unchanging (Joshua 21:45, 23:14, 1 Kings 8:56, and Hebrews 6:13-19). God is a Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 18:2, 89:26, 94:22, and Isaiah 26:4).

Change and decay in all around I see: O Thou who changest not, abide with me! (Henry Lyte, "Abide With Me")

⁷⁰Accordingly, His attributes are sometimes referred to as His "perfections."

⁷¹Process theology is the belief that God is in the process of becoming. For refutations of this heresy, see pp. 166-168 of Grudem, pp. 172-179 of Feinberg, and Appendix B in Storms.

⁷²Much has been made of passages such as Exodus 32:9-14 (verse 14 states: "So the LORD changed His mind"; cf. Judges 2:18, 2 Samuel 24:16//1 Chronicles 21:15, Psalm 106:45, Isaiah 38:1-5, Jeremiah 42:10, Amos 7:3, 6, and Jonah 3:10), especially in light of such passages as 1 Samuel 15:29 ("the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind"; cf. Numbers 23:19). This "tension" is satisfactorily resolved in Ryrie, p. 38; Erickson, p. 279; Grudem, pp. 164-165; Packer, p. 80; Storms, pp. 112-116; Frame, pp. 561-566; McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, pp. 239-243; and Feinberg, pp. 274-276. McCune (*A Systematic Theology*, pp. 240-241) explains: "An unchangeable God must change in His dealings with changeable men in order to remain changeless in His being and character ... immutability does not mean immobility." God is stable, not static (Erickson, p. 279). See Jeremiah 18:7-10, 26:3, 13, 19, Joel 2:13-14, and Jonah 3:9-10.

We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish—but naught changeth Thee.
(Walter Smith, “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father!
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.
(Thomas Chisholm, “Great is Thy Faithfulness”)

Some Differences God’s Immutability Makes in Our Lives

1. Because God is immutable, we can take comfort in His constancy, knowing He is ever stable, reliable, dependable, faithful. See Isaiah 26:4, Malachi 3:6, and Hebrews 6:17-19.
2. Because God is immutable, we should seek to be stable, reliable, dependable, and faithful, being where we are supposed to be, when we are supposed to be there, and doing what we are supposed to be doing (see the start of 1 Corinthians 15:58).

God is Eternal

Declarations

Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God (Psalm 90:2; cf. Genesis 21:33, Deuteronomy 32:40, 33:27, Job 36:26, Psalm 93:2, 102:24, 27//Hebrews 1:12, Isaiah 9:6, 26:4, 40:28, Daniel 4:34, Micah 5:2, Habakkuk 1:12, John 1:1, Romans 16:26, 1 Timothy 1:17, Hebrews 9:14, Revelation 1:4, 8, and 4:8-10).

Definition

When we say that God is eternal, we mean that He has no beginning or end.

Description

God was never born (see Psalm 90:2, 93:2, Micah 5:2, and Habakkuk 1:12; God is uncreated and uncaused; we have a birthday, God does not) and He will never die (He is immortal: Romans 1:23, 1 Timothy 1:17, and 6:16; cf. Psalm 90:2; His existence cannot be extinguished). There was never a time when He was not. He simply is (Exodus 3:14). He is timeless/atemporal, transcending time.⁷³ God created time. God neither has age⁷⁴ nor does He age.⁷⁵ Time is inconsequential to God (Psalm 90:4⁷⁶ and 2 Peter 3:8).

Some Differences God's Eternality Makes in Our Lives

1. Because God is eternal, He is to be eternally praised (as did Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:34 and as do those in Revelation 4:8-10). As 1 Timothy 1:17 says: *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen* (cf. Psalm 41:13 and 106:48). What a mind-bending, mind-boggling, and mind-blowing attribute is God's eternity!
2. Because God is eternal, we can be at peace. Isaiah 26:3-4 says: *"The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You.*

⁷³Louis Berkhof (cited in Ryrie, pp. 36-37) describes God's eternity as "that perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limits and all succession of moments, and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present."

⁷⁴"The question, How old is God? is simply inappropriate. He is no older now than a year ago, for infinity plus one is no more than infinity. He simply is not restricted by the dimension of time" (Erickson, p. 274).

⁷⁵"There is no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity" (Pink, p. 37).

⁷⁶According to Grudem (p. 170), a "watch in the night" is a 3- or 4-hour period a guard would stand watch.

“Trust in the Lord forever, For in God the Lord, we have an everlasting Rock.” Deuteronomy 33:26-28 likewise says in regards to God’s Old Testament people, Israel: “There is none like the God of Jeshurun [NASB marginal note: Israel], Who rides the heavens to your help, And through the skies in His majesty. “The eternal God is a dwelling place, And underneath are the everlasting arms ... “So Israel dwells in security ...”

God is Free

Declarations

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’ (Daniel 4:35; cf. Job 23:13 and 42:2).

Definition

When we say that God is free, we mean that He is independent of everyone and everything else.

Description

God is the only one who can do what He wants, when He wants, where He wants, how He wants, to whom He wants, for whom He wants, and for whatever reason(s) He wants (see Job 23:13, 42:2, Psalm 115:3, 135:6, Isaiah 46:9-11, Daniel 4:35, Ephesians 1:5, 9, and 11).⁷⁷ God does not have to do anything,⁷⁸ including create (Revelation 4:11), reveal (Ephesians 1:9 and Colossians 1:27), or save (Exodus 33:19//Romans 9:15 and Romans 9:18). God is not indebted to us; God does not owe us anything (Job 41:11//Romans 11:35). God is not dependent on us; rather, we are desperately dependent on Him (see Job 34:14-15, Psalm 104:29, Daniel 5:23, Acts 17:25b, 28, Romans 11:36a, Colossians 1:17, and Hebrews 1:3). Only God is truly free; only He has an absolutely free will. Human freedom/free will is relative, relative to God, not absolute. Finitude limits human freedom. Slavery to sin (John 8:34, Romans 6:6, 16-22, Galatians 4:8-9, Titus 3:3, and 2 Peter 2:19) limits human freedom. God’s freedom is further seen by the fact that He is self-existent⁷⁹ (John 5:26; cf. Exodus 3:14’s “I AM”) and self-sufficient (Psalm 50:12 and Acts 17:25a).⁸⁰

⁷⁷“Can we imagine the Lord God of Hosts having to request permission of anyone or to apply for anything to a higher body? To whom would God go for permission? Who is higher than the Highest? Who is mightier than the Almighty? Whose position antedates that of the Eternal? At whose throne would God kneel? Where is the greater one to whom He must appeal” (Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 109)?

⁷⁸Technically-speaking, God does have to do what is consistent with His nature, as well as what He has chosen to do. Both of these “limitations,” however, are self-imposed.

⁷⁹“Some theologians use the word aseity to denote self-existence; i.e., God depends *a se*, on Himself” (Ryrie, p. 37).

⁸⁰“People have sometimes thought that God created human beings because he was lonely and needed fellowship with other persons. If this were true, it would certainly mean that God is not completely independent of creation” (Grudem, p. 161). The Godhead has never been lonely, but has had and will continue to have an eternal, inter-trinitarian, interrelationship (see, for example, John 17:24).

Conclusion

While we have sought to give practical applications to nearly all of the attributes we have studied in this series, the top takeaway ought to be praise, praising God simply for who He is, adoring Him for His attributes, for His:

- Sovereignty (1 Chronicles 29:10-13, Psalm 97:1, Daniel 4:34, Jude 25, and Revelation 19:6)
- Omnipotence (1 Chronicles 29:10-13, Psalm 21:13, Daniel 2:20, Revelation 5:12, 7:12, and 19:6)
- Holiness (Psalm 30:4, 99:9, 103:1, and Revelation 15:4a)
- Love (1 Chronicles 16:34, Psalm 63:3, 107:1, 8, 15, 21, 31, 118:1, 29, 136:1-3, and 26)
- Grace (Ephesians 1:6)
- Wisdom (Daniel 2:20, Romans 16:27, Revelation 5:12, and 7:12)
- Justice (Daniel 4:37)
- Eternality (Daniel 4:34 and 1 Timothy 1:17)

Soli Deo gloria!