

# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 1 – 5 December 2010

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**Arthur Walkington Pink** (1 April 1886 – 15 July 1952) was an [English Christian](#) evangelist and Biblical scholar known for his solidly biblical and Puritan-like teachings.



Pink was born in Nottingham, England and became a Christian in 1908, at the age of 22. Though born to Christian parents, prior to conversion he migrated into a Theosophical society (an [occult gnostic](#) group popular in England during that time), and quickly rose in prominence within their ranks. His conversion came from his father's patient admonitions from Scripture. It was the verse, **Proverbs 14:12**, 'there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death,' which particularly struck his heart and compelled him to renounce Theosophy and follow Jesus.

Desiring to grow in knowledge of the Bible, Pink immigrated to the United States to study at Moody Bible Institute. Impatient, he left there after only two months and began his first pastorate in Silverton Colorado. In 1916 he married Vera E. Russell (January 8, 1893 - July 17, 1962), who was from Kentucky.

In May of 1929, Pink and his wife moved to Morton's Gap and joined the Baptist Church there. Pink had hoped to work on his periodical "Studies in the Scriptures," have a Bible Conference and evangelistic ministry in the area, and be a fellow helper to another pastor, C.D. Cole. Within less than a year, the friendship between Pink and Cole dissolved. During one of the services at Morton's Gap, Pink and his wife got up during Cole's sermon and left the church. Though the Morton's Gap Baptist Church had over a hundred active members, Pink announced that there were only eight or nine saved members of the congregation and Cole was not one of them.

In May of 1930, Pink moved to Colorado, then California, then Britain. From 1925 to 1928 he served in Australia, including as pastor of two congregations from 1926 to 1928, when he returned to England, and to the United States the following year.

In January 1922 he started a monthly magazine entitled *Studies in the Scriptures* which circulated among English-speaking Christians worldwide, though only to a relatively small circulation list of around 1,000.

In 1934 Pink returned to England, and within a few years turned his Christian service to writing books and pamphlets. Pink died in Stornoway, Scotland on July 15, 1952. The cause of death was anemia.

Contentment, then, is the product of a heart resting in God. It is the soul's enjoyment of that peace that passes all understanding. It is the outcome of my will being brought into subjection to the Divine will. It is the blessed assurance that God does all things well, and is, even now, making all things work together for my ultimate good. Instead of complaining at his lot, a contented man is thankful that his condition and circumstances are no worse than they are. Instead of greedily desiring something more than the supply of his present need, he rejoices that God still cares for him. Such an one is "content" with such as he has.

A spiritual and saving knowledge of God is the greatest need of every human creature. –  
*The Attributes Of God - A.W. Pink*

**Job 22: 21** – Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee

**Jeremiah 9: 23 - 24** Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty glory in his might, let not the rich glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and *knoweth Me*, that I am the Lord

1. Do you agree with Pink's statement, "a spiritual and saving knowledge of God is the greatest need of every human creature"? Explain.

It has been said by someone that "the proper study of mankind is man." I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumbline cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing." No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God....

But while the subject *humbles* the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe.... The most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ, and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.

And, whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently *consolatory*. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead. It is to that subject that I invite you this morning.

*Charles Haddon Spurgeon - January 7, 1855*

What were we made for? What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the “eternal life” that Jesus give? Knowledge of God. “This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God. “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me” (Jer. 9:23f). What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives Him most pleasure? Knowledge of Himself. “I desire...the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,” says God (Hos. 6:6).

*J.I. Packer – Knowing God*

The foundation of all true knowledge of God must be a clear mental apprehension of His perfections as revealed in Holy Scripture. An unknown God can neither be trusted, served, nor worshipped – *The Attributes Of God - A.W. Pink*

2. Why is it that a true and clear knowledge of God must come from Scripture? What happens when men stray from this principle?

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3. Why do you think the knowledge of God and His perfections is often ignored or seen as impractical?

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4. List as many reasons as you can think of why studying the character and person of God is a valuable and vital exercise.

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Something more than a theoretical knowledge of God is needed by us. God is only truly known in the soul as we yield ourselves to Him, submit to His authority, and regulate all the details of our lives by His holy precepts and commandments – *The Attributes Of God - A.W. Pink*

**Hosea 6: 3** - Then shall we know, if we follow on to *know* the Lord

**John 7: 17** - If any man will *do His will*, he shall know

**Daniel 11: 32** - The people that do *know* their God shall be strong"

5. Describe how a true knowledge of God differs from a mere theoretical knowledge.

Those who know God have great thoughts of God  
Those who know God show great boldness for God  
Those who know God have great contentment in God  
*J.I. Packer – Knowing God*

We must never forget that our ***knowledge of God is a gift, not a given***. What I mean by this is that we all too often presume that what we know of God is either something we gained by self-exertion, dedication, and study, or it is something we deserve, perhaps something that is our by right or entitlement. We should never treat the knowledge of God as a given. It is something He gives, and He does not give it universally. This is nowhere better seen in our Lord's words in Matthew 11.

**Matthew 11: 20** Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.

21 "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.

22 "Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you.

23 "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

24 "Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."

25 **At that time** Jesus answered and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes.

26 "Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight.

27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.



Notice that, immediately following our Lord's denunciation of the people in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for their calloused indifference to the presence and power of the Son of God in their midst (vv. 20-24), there is a phrase, "at that time".

It would have been easy, even understandable, for us to get discouraged 'at that time' if we were in Jesus' situation. After all, the very towns in which He was most well-known and performed His greatest miracles **had treated him with utter apathy**. They simply didn't care. If ever there were a "time" for complaint, this was it. If ever there were a "time" for bitterness and resentment, this was it. We would have reacted this way.

But instead, Jesus gives thanks! He praises the Father! He delights himself in the reassuring fact that God is sovereign, that all things are under divine control, and that nothing, not even the stubborn unbelief of men and women can frustrate His purposes. The world's disdainful response could have been a source of pain, but the Father's sovereign purpose was a more than sufficient remedy to the attitude of our Christ!

It is an important theological lesson for us to note that our Lord's emphasis in vv. 25-27 on the sovereign initiative of God in both the giving and hiding of revelation does not eliminate or undermine the moral responsibility of people. Indeed, the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum will be held to a higher standard of accountability precisely because they had been given so much but had responded so little.

The "wise and intelligent" are those who, if they had lived up to their reputation for being so learned, should have been the first to acknowledge who Jesus was. The "wise and intelligent" are the self-reliant who are convinced they have no need of divine wisdom. But Jesus isn't excluding smart people from the kingdom. It isn't intellectual power he condemns but intellectual *pride*.

"Infants" or "babes" are those who humbly acknowledge their need for divine mercy. Simply put, the knowledge of God isn't the product of natural law or human logic or chance occurrence. Spiritual understanding doesn't depend on human achievement or IQ or social status or political influence. Rather, it is the fruit of divine illumination.

Far from bemoaning or finding fault with the Father's sovereign purpose, Jesus rejoiced. "Whatever pleases you, Father, pleases me!"

Notice:

### **1. Jesus has absolute and universal authority**

v. 27a - *All things have been handed over to Me by My Father*

### **2. Jesus has a special and unique relationship with God the Father**

v. 27b - no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him). See John 5:18; 10:30-31. To "know" is more than mental acquaintance; it is intimate relationship and deep spiritual communion.

### **3. Jesus alone can reveal the Father to others**

v. 27c - nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him

Just as the Son praises the Father for revealing and concealing according to his good pleasure so the Father has authorized the Son to reveal or not according to *His* will" Evidently, one of the "things" the Father has given to the Son is the authority to decide to whom the Father shall be revealed!

When the Father finally makes sense to us, when we come to know him truly, to the degree that we grasp something of his nature and will and ways, it is because the Son has graciously stooped to reveal him to us.

Our knowledge of God does not come naturally. Neither is it ultimately the product of meticulous research or study. It certainly isn't because we deserve it. It's a gift from his Son. He and he alone is the mediator of the knowledge of God to mankind.

See Mt. 16:17. If one is to know the Son the Father must reveal him. If one is to know the Father the Son must reveal him. *It takes God to know God!*  
Our response? Humility! Gratitude! Praise!

6. How does the work of Christ and the message of the gospel relate to this whole idea of truly knowing God?

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#### **PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK:**

Read Chapter 1 – “The Solitariness Of God”

1. Do you tend to assume that your conception of God is adequate? How do we guard against this tendency?

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2. Summarize in one sentence the solitariness of God.

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3. Think about God's existence before He created anything. What was this existence like? What kind of response does this stir in you?

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4. If God did not need to create the world why did He? What purpose does it serve?

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5. Describe what state your knowledge of God would be in were it not for His revelation through Scripture and the aid of the Holy Spirit.

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6. How does the solitariness of God serve to highlight and magnify the beauty of Christ's incarnation and work?

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7. What implications does the solitariness of God have for who you are and what you do?

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# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 2 – 12 December 2010

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## THE SOLITARINESS OF GOD

That God is great in wisdom, wondrous in power, yet full of mercy, is assumed by many to be almost common knowledge; but, to entertain anything approaching an adequate conception of His being, His nature, His attributes, as these are revealed in Holy Scripture, is something which very, very few people in these degenerate times have attained unto. God is solitary in His excellency.

*The Attributes Of God - A.W. Pink*

1. Do you tend to assume that your conception of God is adequate? How do we guard against this tendency?

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Review this passage from Exodus and underline those sections which refer to the unique and singular nature of God.

**Exodus 15: 11** - Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?

12 Thou didst stretch out Thy right hand, The earth swallowed them.

13 In Thy lovingkindness Thou hast led the people whom Thou hast redeemed; in Thy strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy habitation.

14 The peoples have heard, they tremble; anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia.

15 Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; the leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

16 Terror and dread fall upon them; by the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone; until Thy people pass over, O LORD, until the people pass over whom Thou hast purchased.

17 Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, the place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established.

18 The LORD shall reign forever and ever.

2. Summarize in one sentence the solitariness of God.

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## The Aseity (Self-Existence) of God

The word aseity, meaning that God has life in Himself and draws His unending energy from Himself (*a se* in Latin means "from himself"), was coined by theologians to express this truth, which the Bible makes clear.

God is self-existent and has always been. Our Maker exists in an eternal, self-sustaining, necessary way. We say necessary in the sense that God does not have it in Himself to go out of existence just as we do not have it in us to live forever. We necessarily age and die, because it is our present nature to do that; God necessarily continues forever unchanged, because it is His eternal nature to do that.

This is one of many contrasts between creature and Creator. God's self-existence is basic truth. At the outset of His presentation of the unknown God to the Athenian idolaters, Paul explained that this God, the world's Creator, "is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:23-25).

Sacrifices offered to idols, in today's tribal religions or in ancient Athens, are thought of as somehow keeping the god going, but the Creator (the I AM) needs no such support system.

*J.I. Packer – Concise Theology*

"In the beginning, God" (Gen. 1:1). There was a time, if "time" is could be called, when God, in the unity of His nature (though subsisting equally in three Divine Persons), dwelt all alone. "In the beginning, God." There was no heaven, where His glory is now particularly manifested. There was no earth to engage His attention. There were no angels to hymn His praises; no universe to be upheld by the word of His power. There was nothing, no one, but God; and *that*, not for a day, a year, or an age, but "from everlasting."

During a past eternity, God was alone: self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied; in need of nothing. Had a universe, had angels, had human beings been *necessary* to Him in any way, they also had been called into existence from all eternity. The creating of them when He did, added **nothing** to God essentially. He changes not, therefore His essential glory can be neither **augmented** nor **diminished**.

**Malachi 3: 6** - For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

3. Think about God's existence before He created anything. What was this existence like? What kind of response does this stir in you?

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God was under no constraint, no obligation; no necessity to create. That He chose to do so was purely a sovereign act on His part, caused by nothing outside Himself, determined by nothing but His own mere good pleasure; for He works all things after the counsel of His will.

**Ephesians 1: 10c - 12** - In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who **works all things after the counsel of His will**, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

That He did create was simply for His *manifestative* glory. Do some of our readers imagine that we have gone beyond what Scripture warrants? Then our appeal shall be to the Law and the Testimony:

**Nehemiah 9: 5** - Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever! O may Thy glorious name be blessed and exalted above all blessing and praise!

6 "Thou alone art the LORD. Thou hast made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. Thou dost give life to all of them and the heavenly host bows down before Thee.

7 "Thou art the LORD God, Who chose Abram and brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham.

8 "And Thou didst find his heart faithful before Thee, and didst make a covenant with him To give him the land of the Canaanite, of the Hittite and the Amorite, of the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite - to give it to his descendants. And Thou hast fulfilled Thy promise, for Thou art righteous.

9 "Thou didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and didst hear their cry by the Red Sea.

10 "Then Thou didst perform signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his servants and all the people of his land; for Thou didst know that they acted arrogantly toward them, and didst make a name for Thyself as it is this day.

11 "And Thou didst divide the sea before them, so they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground; and their pursuers Thou didst hurl into the depths, like a stone into raging waters.

12 "And with a pillar of cloud Thou didst lead them by day, and with a pillar of fire by night to light for them the way in which they were to go.

13 "Then Thou didst come down on Mount Sinai, and didst speak with them from heaven; Thou didst give to them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments.

14 "So Thou didst make known to them Thy holy Sabbath, and didst lay down for them commandments, statutes, and law, through Thy servant Moses.

15 "Thou didst provide bread from heaven for them for their hunger, Thou didst bring forth water from a rock for them for their thirst, and Thou didst tell them to enter in order to possess the land which Thou didst swear to give them.

God is no gainer even from our worship. He was in no need of that external glory of His grace which arises from His redeemed, for He is glorious enough in Himself without that. What was it moved Him to predestinate His elect to the praise of the glory of His grace? It was, as Ephesians 1:5 tells us, according to the good pleasure of His will.

4. If God did not need to create the world why did He? What purpose does it serve?

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We are well aware that the high ground we are here treading is new and strange to almost all of our readers; for that reason it is well to move slowly. Let our appeal again be to the Scriptures. At the end of Romans 11, where the apostle brings to a close his long argument on salvation by pure and sovereign grace, he asks,

**Romans 11: 34 – 35** - For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?

*(N.B. the book has 24 & 25 instead of 34 & 35 as above.)*

The force of this is, it is impossible to bring the Almighty under obligations to the creature; God gains nothing from us. If thou be righteous, what givest thou *Him*? Or what receiveth He of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man

**Job 35: 7 – 8** - If you are righteous, what do you give to Him? Or what does He receive from your hand? Your wickedness is for a man like yourself, and your righteousness is for a son of man.

Your righteousness certainly cannot affect God, who is all-blessed in *Himself*. When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants our obedience has profited God nothing.

**Luke 17: 10** – "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"

In his book, "Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church", Michael Horton's tonic for the crisis is to focus on what God does for us rather than what we do for God. "Gifts do not go up to God but come down from the God who does not need anything that would obligate a return (Acts 17:24-35; Rom 11:35-36)." The Son of God did not come to be served, but comes to serve us – "we are the ones who need to be bathed, clothed and fed, not God."

*Review by John Hendryx*

Nay, we go further: our Lord Jesus Christ added nothing to God in His essential being and glory, either by what He did or suffered. True, blessedly and gloriously true, He *manifested* the glory of God *to us*, but He added nought to God. He Himself expressly declares so, and there is no appeal from His words:

**Psalms 16: 2** - O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee;

**Psalm 16: 2** (NAS) - I said to the LORD, "Thou art my Lord; I have no good besides Thee."

The whole of that Psalm is a Psalm of Christ. Christ's goodness or righteousness reached unto His saints in the earth (Psa. 16:3), but God was high above and beyond it all, God only is the "Blessed One" (Mark 14:61, Gr.).

Christians believe that God is completely self-sufficient, that he is complete within himself. There is nothing that God needs that He doesn't already have.

To admit the existence of a need in God is to admit incompleteness in the divine Being. Need is a creature-word and cannot be spoken of the Creator. God has a voluntary relation to everything He has made, but He has no *necessary* relation to anything outside of Himself. His interest in His creatures arises from His sovereign good pleasure, not from any need those creatures can supply nor from any completeness they can bring to Him who is complete in Himself.

*The Knowledge of the Holy - A. W. Tozer*

Practically speaking, it is a serious error to think that humanity is somehow providing God assistance that He *needs* to accomplish his tasks. God may use human beings to complete certain tasks, but He never needs them. He ordains that they participate with Him in the affairs of the world, but only out of His good pleasure. Whenever humans start to think they are indispensable to God, a prideful fall is sure to follow

It is perfectly true that God is both honored and dishonored by men; not in His essential being, but in His official character. It is equally true that God has been "glorified" by creation, by providence, and by redemption. This we do not and dare not dispute for a moment. But all of this has to do with His manifestative glory and the recognition of it by us. Yet had God so pleased He might have continued alone for all eternity, *without making known* His glory unto creatures. Whether He should do so or not was determined solely by His own will. He was perfectly blessed in Himself before the first creature was called into being. And what are all the creatures of His hands *unto Him* even now? Let Scripture again make answer:

**Isaiah 40: 15 – 18** - "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as *nothing*; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?"

*That* is the God of Scripture; alas, He is still "the *unknown* God" (Acts 17:23) to the heedless multitudes.

**Isaiah 40: 22 – 23** - It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.

How vastly different is the God of Scripture from the god of the average pulpit!



Nor is the testimony of the New Testament any different from that of the Old: how could it be, seeing that both have one and the same Author! There too we read,

**1 Timothy 6: 15b - 16** - He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

Such an One is to be revered, worshipped, adored. He is solitary in His majesty, unique in His excellency, peerless in His perfections. He sustains all, but is Himself independent of all. He gives to all, but is enriched by none.

Such a God cannot be found out by searching; He can be known, only as He is *revealed* to the heart by the Holy Spirit through the Word. It is true that creation demonstrates a Creator, and that, so plainly, men are "without excuse;" yet, we still have to say with Job,

**Job 26: 14** - "Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; And how faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand?"

The so-called argument from design by well-meaning "Apologists" has, we believe, done much more harm than good, for it has attempted to bring down the great God to the level of finite comprehension, and thereby has lost sight of His solitary excellence.

Analogy has been drawn between a savage finding a watch upon the sands, and from a close examination of it he infers a watch-maker. So far so good. But attempt to go further: suppose that savage sits down on the sand and endeavors to form to himself a conception of this watch-maker, his personal affections and manners; his disposition, acquirements, and moral character—all that goes to make up a personality; could he ever think or reason out a real man—the man who made the watch, so that he could say, "I am acquainted with him?" It seems trifling to ask such questions, but is the eternal and infinite God so much more within the grasp of human reason? No, indeed! The God of Scripture can only be known by those to whom He *makes Himself known*.

Nor is God known by the intellect. "God is Spirit" (John 4:24), and therefore can only be known spiritually. But fallen man is not spiritual, he is carnal. He is dead to all that is spiritual. Unless he is born again supernaturally brought from death unto life, miraculously translated out of darkness into light, he cannot even see the things of God (John 3:3), still less apprehend them (1 Cor. 2:14). The Holy Spirit has to shine in our hearts (not intellects) in order to give us

**2 Corinthians 4: 6** – For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

And even that spiritual knowledge is but fragmentary. The regenerated soul has to *grow* in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet. 3:18).

5. Describe what state your knowledge of God would be in were it not for His revelation through Scripture and the aid of the Holy Spirit.

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The principal prayer and aim of Christians should be that we "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and *increasing* in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

6. How does the solitariness of God serve to highlight and magnify the beauty of Christ's incarnation and work?

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7. What implications does the solitariness of God have for who you are and what you do?

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## THE PROGRESSION OF THE WRONG VIEW OF GOD

8. According to **Romans 1: 17 - 23** what is the result of the fall?

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Moral foolishness inevitably corrupts spirituality. In fact, all the religions humanity has ever devised are the fruit of blind spiritual foolishness. They "[exchange] the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures" (**Rom. 1:23**).

Contrary to the notions of modern anthropology, human religion has not followed an upward evolutionary path. Religion did not begin with paganism and mature over time into monotheism. The exact opposite is true. All human religion, according to Scripture, moves in a direction away from the truth, away from the true God, tending always toward idolatry ("an image in the form of corruptible man"), then animism ("of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures").

*Contrary to the notions of modern anthropology, human religion has not followed an upward evolutionary path.*

After the Fall, Scripture says, "men began to call upon the name of the Lord" (**Gen. 4:26**). From the Fall to the Flood, there is no record of any idolatry. God destroyed the world in the Flood because "the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and ... every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). But nothing in Scripture states that people had devised false gods to worship.

Sometime after the Flood, idolatry began to predominate. Abraham was called out of an idolatrous family (**Josh. 24:2**). Egypt was overrun with idolatry by the time of Moses. And when Israel returned

to the Promised Land, they discovered forms of idolatry among the Canaanites that were even more hideous than anything they had seen in Egypt. When they failed to wipe out all the Canaanites, those people's false religions became a perpetual snare to the succeeding generations of Israelites.

Ancient history confirms that religion has **de**volved and descended into polytheism and animism. Herodotus, writing in the fifth century B.C., said early Persia had no pagan temples or idols. Augustine cites a first-century Roman historian, Varro, who said "the old Romans were a hundred threescore and ten years without idols."<sup>6</sup> That means it was not until 170 years *after* Rome was founded that the Romans adopted polytheism and idolatry. Lucian, a second-century Greek writer, made a similar observation about ancient Greece and Egypt.

People are by nature inclined to turn from the glory of God to idols, to "[exchange] the truth of God for a lie, and [worship and serve] the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). The human conscience demands God, but people tend to choose a diety of their own making. That is why the First Commandment is, "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them" (Ex. 20:3–5). But even while Moses was receiving that commandment from the Lord, Aaron and the Israelites were making a golden calf to worship (32:1–6).

Is our society any different from the Romans 1 description? Certainly not. People in modern culture tend to have materialistic idols—money, prestige, success, philosophy, health, pleasure, sports, entertainment, possessions, and other such things. Those things become idols when we give them the love and dedication we owe to God. The problem is the same—worshiping the creation rather than the Creator.

But don't get the idea that the idolatry in our society is somehow more sophisticated than the idolatry of primitive paganism. Consider the changes that have taken place in religion in America in the past fifty years or so.

The New Age movement has popularized Hinduism. Astrology, spiritism, and other occult religions have enjoyed unprecedented popularity. Native American religions, Voodoo, Santeria, Druidism, Wicca (witchcraft), and other ancient pagan beliefs have been revived. Now Satan worship, a thing unheard of in our nation two generations ago, is one of the fastest growing cults in the nation—and is especially conspicuous in the youth culture. I recently heard a news report that in Orange County, California,

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<sup>5</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1:31.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 4:31.

<sup>7</sup> Lucian, *The Syrian Goddess*, 34.

alone more than five hundred cases of ritual animal sacrifice involving stolen pets have been recorded over the past decade.

*The Vanishing Conscience – John MacArthur*

Now people in our culture are worshiping the elements, spotted owls, or dolphins and whales. Earth—and creature—worship seem at their apex in this society, which has no place for the Creator God. Mother Earth is preferred to Father God.

Far from being humanity's highest attainment, religion is one of the most obvious manifestations of the debauchery of our race. The vilest sin of all is blaspheming God by having other gods before Him. So sinners who reject the true God are often extremely religious. Manmade religion is not evidence of human nobility; it is proof of human depravity. False religion is humanity at its lowest. It is not humanity ascended to the heights, but people lost and groping in the muck of godlessness. All the trends in modern religion and modern materialism underscore that fact.

9. According to **Romans 1: 24 - 25** what did God do to those who reject Him?

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***Uncontrolled lust.*** Another step in humanity's downward spiral occurs when people become enslaved to their own passions: "God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them" (**Rom. 1:24**).

Nothing characterizes contemporary Western society more than lust. The size and power of the modern entertainment industry testifies eloquently to how thoroughly given over to lust our society is. Greed, gluttony, and sexual desire are the primary tools of the advertizing industry. Lust is big business in our culture.

*A dozen or so daily televised talk shows appeal shamelessly to people's prurient interests.*

As people's lusts are fed and encouraged, society grows more and more tolerant of immorality, indecency, obscenity, pornography, profanity, and other forms of smut. We noted earlier how standards in the entertainment industry have declined dramatically in the past few years. Gratuitous obscenities and sex scenes are routinely included even in films promoted as children's fare. Music videos thrive on sex and sleaze. What the television networks are willing to broadcast into our living rooms becomes more explicit each season.

A dozen or so daily televised talk shows appeal shamelessly to people's prurient interests. Every conceivable lewd and perverted practice is paraded before daytime audiences. The only moral values viewers are expected to maintain, it seems, are tolerance and an open mind toward any kind of behavior.

Sinful lust comes in various forms. The Greek word for lust is *epithumia*, which simply means "desire." Sinful desires include an insatiable hunger for pleasure, profits, power, prestige, and sex. In short, lust is a desire for anything God forbids. Such sinful cravings Scripture calls fleshly lusts (cf. Rom.

13:14; Eph. 2:3; 2 Pet. 2:18; 1 Jn. 2:16). We are explicitly commanded to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11).

Those who feed their lusts are judged accordingly: “God gave them over ... to impurity” (**Rom. 1:24**). The expression “gave them over” (Gk., *paradidōmi*) is a word sometimes used of putting someone in prison (Mk. 1:14; Acts 8:3). It speaks of a judicial act of God whereby He withdraws His restraining hand from an individual whose conscience is hardened. That person becomes enslaved to his or her own lusts. In other words, God allows the consequences of that person’s sin to run their catastrophic course. That course, driven by uncontrolled lust, inevitably reverts to the worst forms of sexual promiscuity: “Their bodies [are] dishonored among them” (**Rom. 1:24**).

10. According to **Romans 1: 26 - 32** how extensive is the judgement of God?

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*Sexual perversion.* Free from the deterrent of a healthy conscience and without God’s gracious restraint, runaway lusts inevitably lead to the most debased and perverted kinds of sexual sin. Fleshly desires deteriorate to become “degrading passions”: “For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error” (**Rom. 1:26–27**).

That is precisely the course our society has taken. Sexual practices that were almost universally viewed as hideously perverted a few decades ago are now flaunted and celebrated in our streets. Homosexuals have become bold—even arrogant—in demanding society’s approval for their wickedness. Nonbiblical thinking has so corrupted society’s collective conscience that the consensus is fast growing sympathetic with the homosexual movement. Having abandoned Scripture as a standard, our culture has no authority to declare homosexuality immoral. A few consciences are still struck with horror at the thought of such iniquity. But extreme pressure is brought to bear upon such people to try to make them feel they should be broad-minded, accepting, permissive, and even supportive of such perversions. Those who are not fully committed to Scripture have no line of defense against the tide of public opinion. And so society’s collective conscience erodes even further, hastening the downward spiral.

How tolerant has our society become of homosexual practices? Many large cities now sponsor annual “Gay Pride” celebrations, featuring parades with floats and marching groups that exalt the homosexual lifestyle. The news reports you see about “Gay Pride” parades do not tell the full story. They couldn’t. Much of what goes on in those parades is so explicit and so debauched that to capture the images and put them on television news would constitute the grossest kind of pornography. Such parades have become rallying points for the homosexual community in their bid to gain political influence and thereby impose their deviant and deadly value system on the rest of society. In that pursuit they have had remarkable success over the past few years.

New York City, for example, opened the nation's first high school for homosexuals—Harvey Milk School, named for a murdered San Francisco city supervisor who was also a homosexual rights activist.<sup>8</sup> The school meets, incongruously enough, in the parish house of a Methodist church. Some of the school's students are transvestites, and some are male prostitutes.

Gay advocacy groups abound and have grown more militant in recent years. With names such as Queer Nation, GLAAD ("Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation"), ACT-UP ("AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power"), SQUISH ("Strong Queers United In Stopping Heterosexism"), Dykes on Bikes, and Fighting Fairies, these groups practice a kind of in-your-face activism designed to shock, defy, and intimidate anyone who dares suggest that their lifestyle is sinful.

Politically, the gay rights movement has made substantial gains. In his first year as president, Bill Clinton appointed at least seventeen homosexuals and lesbians to public office—then invited them all to a breakfast reception to celebrate. "For the first time in the history of mankind a president has sought to break this barrier, this taboo," one of the appointees said triumphantly. "For that, Bill Clinton is going to go down in history."<sup>9</sup>

Government agencies and the courts are now adding their clout to the effort to recognize homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle. In Wisconsin, two young female students advertised for a third roommate to share their private residence. Because they rejected an applicant who had told them she was a lesbian, they were forced by the state Human Rights Commission to pay the lesbian applicant \$1,500 for having caused her distress. The Commission also demanded a public letter of apology and required the two girls to attend a "re-education class" taught by homosexuals.

*The Vanishing Conscience – John MacArthur*

Such government-sponsored moral indoctrination is becoming more and more common. Homosexual rights laws have forced groups such as Big Brothers to advertize in homosexual newspapers for men whom they match up with fatherless boys for companionship and role modeling. The organization once excluded homosexual applicants, but they have changed their policy under government pressure. The same kind of pressure has been levied against the Boy Scouts to accept homosexuals as scoutmasters.

The rhetoric of gay-rights activism portrays homosexuality in wholly non-moral terms: it is an "alternate lifestyle," a matter of one's "sexual orientation." At the heart of the argument is the notion that one's sexual behavior is not a matter of choice. Homosexual tendencies are determined by genetic, not environmental causes—or so the argument goes—and therefore homosexuality cannot be inherently immoral. But in the first place, researchers have not been able to establish that homosexual tendencies have any genetic causes. Even if such a cause could be established,

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<sup>8</sup>Dennis A. Williams and Susan Agrest, "A School for Homosexuals," *Newsweek* (17 June 1985), 93.

<sup>9</sup>"Quotable," *Daily News* (3 November 1993), 6.

however, would that alter the fact that God's Word declares homosexuality to be immoral? Humanistic psychopathology has been attempting for years to blame all sorts of sinful behavior—alcoholism, drug addiction, habitual criminality, and sexual perversion—on genetic causes. That whole line of argument misses the obvious point that Scripture clearly teaches we are all born utterly sinful. Everyone has an inborn tendency to sin. That does not release us from the guilt of sinful actions.

And what is the next “alternate lifestyle” or “sexual orientation” to be legitimized? Sadomasochism—sex mixed with brutality? Bestiality—sex with animals? Necrophilia—sex with corpses? Or perhaps pedophilia—sex with children?

You might be shocked to know that homosexual pedophiles already have an advocacy group: NAMBLA—“National American Man Boy Love Association.” NAMBLA's slogan is “Sex by eight, before it's too late.” The organization, which operates openly under constitutional protection, even publishes a newsletter for members all across the country. The publisher of that paper is a schoolteacher!

Others believe incest should be legalized and encouraged. The Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SEICUS) has circulated a paper suggesting that “moral and religious pronouncements with respect to incest” are all wrong. Guilt about breaking the taboo is actually more harmful than the practice itself, the paper says. It complains that the incest taboo “has prevented scientific investigation,” and calls for those with “the guts to find out what is really happening” to launch an aggressive program of incest research.<sup>10</sup> SEICUS, by the way, is the same group that has been so influential in setting the sex-education agenda for public schools nationwide.

*What is most distressing is that many churches and denominations are now ordaining practicing homosexuals to the ministry.*

Society has become so tolerant that no behavior, it seems, is too perverted to be openly advocated. All of this is frightening evidence that God has abandoned our sinful society to its own degrading passions. Humanism has dehumanized our culture.

What is most distressing is that many churches and denominations are now ordaining practicing homosexuals to the ministry. The homosexual community even has its own denominations, some of which profess to be evangelical. More and more people within the evangelical community are voicing the opinion that homosexuality may not really be sinful after all. Many church leaders seem reluctant to take an uncompromising biblical stand.

But Scripture is clear. The Bible condemns homosexuality in explicit and undeniable terms. The Old Testament law grouped homosexuality with incest, bestiality, and other perversions, and the penalty for its practice was death (Lev. 20:13, cf. vv. 11–16). In Romans 1, Paul clearly teaches that homosexual practices are “indecent acts” (v. 27), driven by “degrading passions” (v. 26). The apostle listed homosexuality with the lowest forms of human degradation: “those who are lawless and rebellious ... , the ungodly and sinners ... , the unholy and profane ... , those who kill their fathers or

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin DeMott, “The Pro-Incest Lobby,” *Psychology Today* (March 1980), 11.

mothers ... , murderers and immoral men and *homosexuals* and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching” (1 Tim. 1:9–10, emphasis added). He wrote, “Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor *homosexuals*, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9–10, emphasis added).

11. According to **Romans 2: 1 - 4** is there any escape?

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Is there no hope for homosexuals? Thankfully, there *is* hope. Those who repent and are reborn in Christ can be freed from the sins that would otherwise destroy them. Immediately after giving that long list of the kinds of people who will not inherit the kingdom, Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, “*Such were some of you*; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (v. 11, emphasis added).

Unrepentant homosexuals, according to Scripture, “receiv[e] in their own persons the due penalty of their error” (**Rom. 1:27**). And the society that tolerates such sins is judged as well. What is “the due penalty of their error”? The consequences of their sin. AIDS is certainly one aspect of that. But an even worse judgment, the final temporal blow from the hand of a righteous God, is when He “[gives] them over to a depraved mind” (v. 28). They bottom out spiritually as well as morally. The conscience seems to vanish completely. They can indulge themselves in the evil acts they so love—“those things which are not proper”—until they fill themselves up with unrighteousness.

#### *The Death of the Conscience*

It is unsettling to see how precisely the decline of our society parallels Paul’s description of the downward spiral of sin. Maurice Roberts has written,

The wheel of history has come full-circle. We are, as a civilization, rotating back to the state of affairs depicted by the apostle Paul in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans ....

The time was when Bible commentators expounded Romans chapter 1 more or less from the standpoint of the first century of the Roman world only. But that day has gone forever. The modern Christian in the West can now see himself as much in the arena of a reprobate society as did the apostles. The state of modern religion and morals exactly parallels that of the apostolic age and it is summed up in the one word: *Decadence*. Pagan Rome could teach modern man very little that he does not know already about sophisticated wickedness. Pagan Greece, pagan Egypt, and pagan Babylon might even learn a thing or two from this generation about how to shun gospel-light and add to the mountains of man’s provocation.

What makes the Bible-reader saddest of all is to see that society today has learnt nothing from the past or from two thousand years of Bible



production and printing, but is repeating the very vices which always provoke God to give the world over to its own sensuality and self-destruction.

*The Banner of Truth, "God Gave Them Up" - Maruice Roberts*

Perhaps even more distressing is the realization that we have already reached that final stage. Conscience has been silenced. Nothing is left to instruct people's behavior but their own depraved minds. The mind becomes a tool of lust unrestrained:

Just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (**Rom. 1:28–32**).

For the third time in the space of five verses, Paul has used the word *paradidōmi*, "gave them over." First he said, "God gave them over ... to impurity" (v. 24); then, "God gave them over to degrading passions" (v. 26); and now, "God gave them over to a depraved mind" (v. 28). Notice the downward progression. Again, it exactly parallels the decline of contemporary society over the past three or four decades. Who can read those verses and deny that they describe our own society right now with an uncanny precision? The mind is morally useless. It cannot discern right from wrong, good from evil. We might assume that someone would figure out that a biblical moral standard would correct much that is wrong with our society, but that simple, rational idea escapes the reprobate mind. Confirmed sinners cannot think logically about moral issues. The conscience itself is victimized!

In a final act of temporal judgment, God has utterly abandoned people to the wickedness they love so much: "unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, [and] malice," so that society is filled with "gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful" (**Romans 1: 29 - 31**).

The word translated "unloving" in that list is *astorgos*, literally meaning "without natural affection"—and it is so translated in the King James Version. It speaks of those who lack instinctive love for their own families—such as mothers who abandon their children, husbands who beat their wives, children who despise their parents, fathers who molest their children, or brothers and sisters who loathe one another. Our society is rife with such wrongdoing; perhaps no other description would better characterize contemporary culture than to say people lack natural affection.

The other items in Paul's list—such as greed, envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, slander, insolence, arrogance, pride, inventive evildoing, disobedience to parents, mercilessness, and hatred of God—perfectly catalog the most visible traits of modern society. Not that previous generations have been free of such evils. But unlike our ancestors, people in our day openly exhibit such sins with a

shameless arrogance. “They not only do [those things], but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (v. 32). Something is seriously, desperately wrong with our culture.

People who follow the culture rather than obey God’s Word are utterly without excuse. “They know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death,” Paul writes (v. 32). Their own consciences witness against them. They may suppress their sense of guilt now, but when they must give account to God, their own consciences will stand against them.

*Civilization as we know it has reached the deepest level of corruption and abides under a sentence of divine condemnation.*

Those who deal falsely with their own consciences place themselves under God’s holy wrath even in this life. “God [gives] them over to a depraved mind” (v. 28). In other words, it turns out that the damage they do to their own consciences *is* God’s immediate judgment against them. “This is the judgment,” Jesus said, “that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil” (Jn. 3:19). Those who reject the light are condemned to live in darkness. God gives them over to their own depravity, and their conscience ceases to function correctly.

It is a wretched and horrifying state of affairs. Our society openly condones and defends the worst kinds of evil. Civilization as we know it has reached the deepest level of corruption and abides under a sentence of divine condemnation. People’s consciences have been seared, debased, obstructed, repressed, and overturned. Without a functioning conscience, people are destined only to sink deeper and deeper into wickedness. Humanity is merely storing up wrath against the day of wrath (cf. Rom. 2:5).

Is there hope? For those willing to repent and follow Christ, there is. They can “be saved from this perverse generation” (Acts 2:40). Their consciences can be renewed and cleansed (Heb. 9:14). They can become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17).

Can society itself be saved? Certainly not without full-scale revival. Unless multitudes turn to Christ, the downward spiral is certain to continue. With so many dampened consciences and hardened hearts, it would take a revival of unprecedented proportions to reverse the downward direction of our culture. The problems are spiritual and cannot be solved through politics or education. Christians who believe political activism can reverse the trends in our society do not understand the nature of the problem. True believers must realize that the state of our society is the result of the righteous judgment of God. God has not commissioned His people to reconstruct society. We are not called to expend our energies for moral reform. We are salt—a preservative for a decaying generation (Matt. 5:13). And we are lights designed to shine in a way that enables people who see our good works to glorify our heavenly Father (vv. 14–16). In other words, our primary task is to preach the truth of God’s Word, live in obedience to that truth, and to keep ourselves unstained by the world (Jas. 1:27). Our influence on society must be the fruit of that kind of living, not the product of fleshly energy or political clout.

What we can do, and *must* do, is keep our own consciences pure. We must saturate our minds and hearts with the truth of Scripture, and refuse to yield to the spirit of our age. To do that, we must understand our own sinfulness and know how to deal with our sins.

# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

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## THE SOLITARINESS OF GOD

That God is great in wisdom, wondrous in power, yet full of mercy, is assumed by many to be almost common knowledge; but, to entertain anything approaching an adequate conception of His being, His nature, His attributes, as these are revealed in Holy Scripture, is something which very, very few people in these degenerate times have attained unto. God is solitary in His excellency.

*The Attributes Of God - A.W. Pink*

1. Do you tend to assume that your conception of God is adequate? How do we guard against this tendency?

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Review this passage from Exodus and underline those sections which refer to the unique and singular nature of God.

**Exodus 15: 11** - Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?

12 Thou didst stretch out Thy right hand, The earth swallowed them.

13 In Thy lovingkindness Thou hast led the people whom Thou hast redeemed; in Thy strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy habitation.

14 The peoples have heard, they tremble; anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia.

15 Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; the leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

16 Terror and dread fall upon them; by the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone; until Thy people pass over, O LORD, until the people pass over whom Thou hast purchased.

17 Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, the place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established.

18 The LORD shall reign forever and ever.

2. Summarize in one sentence the solitariness of God.

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## The Aseity (Self-Existence) of God

The word aseity, meaning that God has life in Himself and draws His unending energy from Himself (*a se* in Latin means "from himself"), was coined by theologians to express this truth, which the Bible makes clear.

God is self-existent and has always been. Our Maker exists in an eternal, self-sustaining, necessary way. We say necessary in the sense that God does not have it in Himself to go out of existence just as we do not have it in us to live forever. We necessarily age and die, because it is our present nature to do that; God necessarily continues forever unchanged, because it is His eternal nature to do that.

This is one of many contrasts between creature and Creator. God's self-existence is basic truth. At the outset of His presentation of the unknown God to the Athenian idolaters, Paul explained that this God, the world's Creator, "is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:23-25).

Sacrifices offered to idols, in today's tribal religions or in ancient Athens, are thought of as somehow keeping the god going, but the Creator (the I AM) needs no such support system.

*J.I. Packer – Concise Theology*

"In the beginning, God" (Gen. 1:1). There was a time, if "time" is could be called, when God, in the unity of His nature (though subsisting equally in three Divine Persons), dwelt all alone. "In the beginning, God." There was no heaven, where His glory is now particularly manifested. There was no earth to engage His attention. There were no angels to hymn His praises; no universe to be upheld by the word of His power. There was nothing, no one, but God; and *that*, not for a day, a year, or an age, but "from everlasting."

During a past eternity, God was alone: self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied; in need of nothing. Had a universe, had angels, had human beings been *necessary* to Him in any way, they also had been called into existence from all eternity. The creating of them when He did, added **nothing** to God essentially. He changes not, therefore His essential glory can be neither **augmented** nor **diminished**.

**Malachi 3: 6** - For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

3. Think about God's existence before He created anything. What was this existence like? What kind of response does this stir in you?

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God was under no constraint, no obligation; no necessity to create. That He chose to do so was purely a sovereign act on His part, caused by nothing outside Himself, determined by nothing but His own mere good pleasure; for He works all things after the counsel of His will.

**Ephesians 1: 10c - 12** - In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who **works all things after the counsel of His will**, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

That He did create was simply for His *manifestative* glory. Do some of our readers imagine that we have gone beyond what Scripture warrants? Then our appeal shall be to the Law and the Testimony:

**Nehemiah 9: 5** - Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever! O may Thy glorious name be blessed and exalted above all blessing and praise!

6 "Thou alone art the LORD. Thou hast made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. Thou dost give life to all of them and the heavenly host bows down before Thee.

7 "Thou art the LORD God, Who chose Abram and brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham.

8 "And Thou didst find his heart faithful before Thee, and didst make a covenant with him To give him the land of the Canaanite, of the Hittite and the Amorite, of the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite - to give it to his descendants. And Thou hast fulfilled Thy promise, for Thou art righteous.

9 "Thou didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and didst hear their cry by the Red Sea.

10 "Then Thou didst perform signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his servants and all the people of his land; for Thou didst know that they acted arrogantly toward them, and didst make a name for Thyself as it is this day.

11 "And Thou didst divide the sea before them, so they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground; and their pursuers Thou didst hurl into the depths, like a stone into raging waters.

12 "And with a pillar of cloud Thou didst lead them by day, and with a pillar of fire by night to light for them the way in which they were to go.

13 "Then Thou didst come down on Mount Sinai, and didst speak with them from heaven; Thou didst give to them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments.

14 "So Thou didst make known to them Thy holy Sabbath, and didst lay down for them commandments, statutes, and law, through Thy servant Moses.

15 "Thou didst provide bread from heaven for them for their hunger, Thou didst bring forth water from a rock for them for their thirst, and Thou didst tell them to enter in order to possess the land which Thou didst swear to give them.

God is no gainer even from our worship. He was in no need of that external glory of His grace which arises from His redeemed, for He is glorious enough in Himself without that. What was it moved Him to predestinate His elect to the praise of the glory of His grace? It was, as Ephesians 1:5 tells us, according to the good pleasure of His will.

4. If God did not need to create the world why did He? What purpose does it serve?

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We are well aware that the high ground we are here treading is new and strange to almost all of our readers; for that reason it is well to move slowly. Let our appeal again be to the Scriptures. At the end of Romans 11, where the apostle brings to a close his long argument on salvation by pure and sovereign grace, he asks,

**Romans 11: 34 – 35** - For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?

*(N.B. the book has 24 & 25 instead of 34 & 35 as above.)*

The force of this is, it is impossible to bring the Almighty under obligations to the creature; God gains nothing from us. If thou be righteous, what givest thou *Him*? Or what receiveth He of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man

**Job 35: 7 – 8** - If you are righteous, what do you give to Him? Or what does He receive from your hand? Your wickedness is for a man like yourself, and your righteousness is for a son of man.

Your righteousness certainly cannot affect God, who is all-blessed in *Himself*. When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants our obedience has profited God nothing.

**Luke 17: 10** – "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"

In his book, "Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church", Michael Horton's tonic for the crisis is to focus on what God does for us rather than what we do for God. "Gifts do not go up to God but come down from the God who does not need anything that would obligate a return (Acts 17:24-35; Rom 11:35-36)." The Son of God did not come to be served, but comes to serve us – "we are the ones who need to be bathed, clothed and fed, not God."

*Review by John Hendryx*

Nay, we go further: our Lord Jesus Christ added nothing to God in His essential being and glory, either by what He did or suffered. True, blessedly and gloriously true, He *manifested* the glory of God *to us*, but He added nought to God. He Himself expressly declares so, and there is no appeal from His words:

**Psalms 16: 2** - O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee;

**Psalm 16: 2** (NAS) - I said to the LORD, "Thou art my Lord; I have no good besides Thee."

The whole of that Psalm is a Psalm of Christ. Christ's goodness or righteousness reached unto His saints in the earth (Psa. 16:3), but God was high above and beyond it all, God only is the "Blessed One" (Mark 14:61, Gr.).

Christians believe that God is completely self-sufficient, that he is complete within himself. There is nothing that God needs that He doesn't already have.

To admit the existence of a need in God is to admit incompleteness in the divine Being. Need is a creature-word and cannot be spoken of the Creator. God has a voluntary relation to everything He has made, but He has no *necessary* relation to anything outside of Himself. His interest in His creatures arises from His sovereign good pleasure, not from any need those creatures can supply nor from any completeness they can bring to Him who is complete in Himself.

*The Knowledge of the Holy - A. W. Tozer*

Practically speaking, it is a serious error to think that humanity is somehow providing God assistance that He *needs* to accomplish his tasks. God may use human beings to complete certain tasks, but He never needs them. He ordains that they participate with Him in the affairs of the world, but only out of His good pleasure. Whenever humans start to think they are indispensable to God, a prideful fall is sure to follow

It is perfectly true that God is both honored and dishonored by men; not in His essential being, but in His official character. It is equally true that God has been "glorified" by creation, by providence, and by redemption. This we do not and dare not dispute for a moment. But all of this has to do with His manifestative glory and the recognition of it by us. Yet had God so pleased He might have continued alone for all eternity, *without making known* His glory unto creatures. Whether He should do so or not was determined solely by His own will. He was perfectly blessed in Himself before the first creature was called into being. And what are all the creatures of His hands *unto Him* even now? Let Scripture again make answer:

**Isaiah 40: 15 – 18** - "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as *nothing*; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?"

*That* is the God of Scripture; alas, He is still "the *unknown* God" (Acts 17:23) to the heedless multitudes.

**Isaiah 40: 22 – 23** - It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.

How vastly different is the God of Scripture from the god of the average pulpit!



Nor is the testimony of the New Testament any different from that of the Old: how could it be, seeing that both have one and the same Author! There too we read,

**1 Timothy 6: 15b - 16** - He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

Such an One is to be revered, worshipped, adored. He is solitary in His majesty, unique in His excellency, peerless in His perfections. He sustains all, but is Himself independent of all. He gives to all, but is enriched by none.

Such a God cannot be found out by searching; He can be known, only as He is *revealed* to the heart by the Holy Spirit through the Word. It is true that creation demonstrates a Creator, and that, so plainly, men are "without excuse;" yet, we still have to say with Job,

**Job 26: 14** - "Behold, these are the fringes of His ways; And how faint a word we hear of Him! But His mighty thunder, who can understand?"

The so-called argument from design by well-meaning "Apologists" has, we believe, done much more harm than good, for it has attempted to bring down the great God to the level of finite comprehension, and thereby has lost sight of His solitary excellence.

Analogy has been drawn between a savage finding a watch upon the sands, and from a close examination of it he infers a watch-maker. So far so good. But attempt to go further: suppose that savage sits down on the sand and endeavors to form to himself a conception of this watch-maker, his personal affections and manners; his disposition, acquirements, and moral character—all that goes to make up a personality; could he ever think or reason out a real man—the man who made the watch, so that he could say, "I am acquainted with him?" It seems trifling to ask such questions, but is the eternal and infinite God so much more within the grasp of human reason? No, indeed! The God of Scripture can only be known by those to whom He *makes Himself known*.

Nor is God known by the intellect. "God is Spirit" (John 4:24), and therefore can only be known spiritually. But fallen man is not spiritual, he is carnal. He is dead to all that is spiritual. Unless he is born again supernaturally brought from death unto life, miraculously translated out of darkness into light, he cannot even see the things of God (John 3:3), still less apprehend them (1 Cor. 2:14). The Holy Spirit has to shine in our hearts (not intellects) in order to give us

**2 Corinthians 4: 6** – For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

And even that spiritual knowledge is but fragmentary. The regenerated soul has to *grow* in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet. 3:18).

5. Describe what state your knowledge of God would be in were it not for His revelation through Scripture and the aid of the Holy Spirit.

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The principal prayer and aim of Christians should be that we "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and *increasing* in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

6. How does the solitariness of God serve to highlight and magnify the beauty of Christ's incarnation and work?

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7. What implications does the solitariness of God have for who you are and what you do?

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## THE PROGRESSION OF THE WRONG VIEW OF GOD

8. According to **Romans 1: 17 - 23** what is the result of the fall?

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Moral foolishness inevitably corrupts spirituality. In fact, all the religions humanity has ever devised are the fruit of blind spiritual foolishness. They "[exchange] the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures" (**Rom. 1:23**).

Contrary to the notions of modern anthropology, human religion has not followed an upward evolutionary path. Religion did not begin with paganism and mature over time into monotheism. The exact opposite is true. All human religion, according to Scripture, moves in a direction away from the truth, away from the true God, tending always toward idolatry ("an image in the form of corruptible man"), then animism ("of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures").

*Contrary to the notions of modern anthropology, human religion has not followed an upward evolutionary path.*

After the Fall, Scripture says, "men began to call upon the name of the Lord" (**Gen. 4:26**). From the Fall to the Flood, there is no record of any idolatry. God destroyed the world in the Flood because "the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and ... every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). But nothing in Scripture states that people had devised false gods to worship.

Sometime after the Flood, idolatry began to predominate. Abraham was called out of an idolatrous family (**Josh. 24:2**). Egypt was overrun with idolatry by the time of Moses. And when Israel returned

to the Promised Land, they discovered forms of idolatry among the Canaanites that were even more hideous than anything they had seen in Egypt. When they failed to wipe out all the Canaanites, those people's false religions became a perpetual snare to the succeeding generations of Israelites.

Ancient history confirms that religion has **de**volved and descended into polytheism and animism. Herodotus, writing in the fifth century B.C., said early Persia had no pagan temples or idols. Augustine cites a first-century Roman historian, Varro, who said "the old Romans were a hundred threescore and ten years without idols."<sup>6</sup> That means it was not until 170 years *after* Rome was founded that the Romans adopted polytheism and idolatry. Lucian, a second-century Greek writer, made a similar observation about ancient Greece and Egypt.

People are by nature inclined to turn from the glory of God to idols, to "[exchange] the truth of God for a lie, and [worship and serve] the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). The human conscience demands God, but people tend to choose a diety of their own making. That is why the First Commandment is, "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them" (Ex. 20:3–5). But even while Moses was receiving that commandment from the Lord, Aaron and the Israelites were making a golden calf to worship (32:1–6).

Is our society any different from the Romans 1 description? Certainly not. People in modern culture tend to have materialistic idols—money, prestige, success, philosophy, health, pleasure, sports, entertainment, possessions, and other such things. Those things become idols when we give them the love and dedication we owe to God. The problem is the same—worshiping the creation rather than the Creator.

But don't get the idea that the idolatry in our society is somehow more sophisticated than the idolatry of primitive paganism. Consider the changes that have taken place in religion in America in the past fifty years or so.

The New Age movement has popularized Hinduism. Astrology, spiritism, and other occult religions have enjoyed unprecedented popularity. Native American religions, Voodoo, Santeria, Druidism, Wicca (witchcraft), and other ancient pagan beliefs have been revived. Now Satan worship, a thing unheard of in our nation two generations ago, is one of the fastest growing cults in the nation—and is especially conspicuous in the youth culture. I recently heard a news report that in Orange County, California,

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<sup>5</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1:31.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 4:31.

<sup>7</sup> Lucian, *The Syrian Goddess*, 34.

alone more than five hundred cases of ritual animal sacrifice involving stolen pets have been recorded over the past decade.

*The Vanishing Conscience – John MacArthur*

Now people in our culture are worshiping the elements, spotted owls, or dolphins and whales. Earth—and creature—worship seem at their apex in this society, which has no place for the Creator God. Mother Earth is preferred to Father God.

Far from being humanity's highest attainment, religion is one of the most obvious manifestations of the debauchery of our race. The vilest sin of all is blaspheming God by having other gods before Him. So sinners who reject the true God are often extremely religious. Manmade religion is not evidence of human nobility; it is proof of human depravity. False religion is humanity at its lowest. It is not humanity ascended to the heights, but people lost and groping in the muck of godlessness. All the trends in modern religion and modern materialism underscore that fact.

9. According to **Romans 1: 24 - 25** what did God do to those who reject Him?

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***Uncontrolled lust.*** Another step in humanity's downward spiral occurs when people become enslaved to their own passions: "God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them" (**Rom. 1:24**).

Nothing characterizes contemporary Western society more than lust. The size and power of the modern entertainment industry testifies eloquently to how thoroughly given over to lust our society is. Greed, gluttony, and sexual desire are the primary tools of the advertizing industry. Lust is big business in our culture.

*A dozen or so daily televised talk shows appeal shamelessly to people's prurient interests.*

As people's lusts are fed and encouraged, society grows more and more tolerant of immorality, indecency, obscenity, pornography, profanity, and other forms of smut. We noted earlier how standards in the entertainment industry have declined dramatically in the past few years. Gratuitous obscenities and sex scenes are routinely included even in films promoted as children's fare. Music videos thrive on sex and sleaze. What the television networks are willing to broadcast into our living rooms becomes more explicit each season.

A dozen or so daily televised talk shows appeal shamelessly to people's prurient interests. Every conceivable lewd and perverted practice is paraded before daytime audiences. The only moral values viewers are expected to maintain, it seems, are tolerance and an open mind toward any kind of behavior.

Sinful lust comes in various forms. The Greek word for lust is *epithumia*, which simply means "desire." Sinful desires include an insatiable hunger for pleasure, profits, power, prestige, and sex. In short, lust is a desire for anything God forbids. Such sinful cravings Scripture calls fleshly lusts (cf. Rom.

13:14; Eph. 2:3; 2 Pet. 2:18; 1 Jn. 2:16). We are explicitly commanded to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11).

Those who feed their lusts are judged accordingly: “God gave them over ... to impurity” (**Rom. 1:24**). The expression “gave them over” (Gk., *paradidōmi*) is a word sometimes used of putting someone in prison (Mk. 1:14; Acts 8:3). It speaks of a judicial act of God whereby He withdraws His restraining hand from an individual whose conscience is hardened. That person becomes enslaved to his or her own lusts. In other words, God allows the consequences of that person’s sin to run their catastrophic course. That course, driven by uncontrolled lust, inevitably reverts to the worst forms of sexual promiscuity: “Their bodies [are] dishonored among them” (**Rom. 1:24**).

10. According to **Romans 1: 26 - 32** how extensive is the judgement of God?

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*Sexual perversion.* Free from the deterrent of a healthy conscience and without God’s gracious restraint, runaway lusts inevitably lead to the most debased and perverted kinds of sexual sin. Fleshly desires deteriorate to become “degrading passions”: “For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error” (**Rom. 1:26–27**).

That is precisely the course our society has taken. Sexual practices that were almost universally viewed as hideously perverted a few decades ago are now flaunted and celebrated in our streets. Homosexuals have become bold—even arrogant—in demanding society’s approval for their wickedness. Nonbiblical thinking has so corrupted society’s collective conscience that the consensus is fast growing sympathetic with the homosexual movement. Having abandoned Scripture as a standard, our culture has no authority to declare homosexuality immoral. A few consciences are still struck with horror at the thought of such iniquity. But extreme pressure is brought to bear upon such people to try to make them feel they should be broad-minded, accepting, permissive, and even supportive of such perversions. Those who are not fully committed to Scripture have no line of defense against the tide of public opinion. And so society’s collective conscience erodes even further, hastening the downward spiral.

How tolerant has our society become of homosexual practices? Many large cities now sponsor annual “Gay Pride” celebrations, featuring parades with floats and marching groups that exalt the homosexual lifestyle. The news reports you see about “Gay Pride” parades do not tell the full story. They couldn’t. Much of what goes on in those parades is so explicit and so debauched that to capture the images and put them on television news would constitute the grossest kind of pornography. Such parades have become rallying points for the homosexual community in their bid to gain political influence and thereby impose their deviant and deadly value system on the rest of society. In that pursuit they have had remarkable success over the past few years.

New York City, for example, opened the nation's first high school for homosexuals—Harvey Milk School, named for a murdered San Francisco city supervisor who was also a homosexual rights activist.<sup>8</sup> The school meets, incongruously enough, in the parish house of a Methodist church. Some of the school's students are transvestites, and some are male prostitutes.

Gay advocacy groups abound and have grown more militant in recent years. With names such as Queer Nation, GLAAD ("Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation"), ACT-UP ("AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power"), SQUISH ("Strong Queers United In Stopping Heterosexism"), Dykes on Bikes, and Fighting Fairies, these groups practice a kind of in-your-face activism designed to shock, defy, and intimidate anyone who dares suggest that their lifestyle is sinful.

Politically, the gay rights movement has made substantial gains. In his first year as president, Bill Clinton appointed at least seventeen homosexuals and lesbians to public office—then invited them all to a breakfast reception to celebrate. "For the first time in the history of mankind a president has sought to break this barrier, this taboo," one of the appointees said triumphantly. "For that, Bill Clinton is going to go down in history."<sup>9</sup>

Government agencies and the courts are now adding their clout to the effort to recognize homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle. In Wisconsin, two young female students advertised for a third roommate to share their private residence. Because they rejected an applicant who had told them she was a lesbian, they were forced by the state Human Rights Commission to pay the lesbian applicant \$1,500 for having caused her distress. The Commission also demanded a public letter of apology and required the two girls to attend a "re-education class" taught by homosexuals.

*The Vanishing Conscience – John MacArthur*

Such government-sponsored moral indoctrination is becoming more and more common. Homosexual rights laws have forced groups such as Big Brothers to advertize in homosexual newspapers for men whom they match up with fatherless boys for companionship and role modeling. The organization once excluded homosexual applicants, but they have changed their policy under government pressure. The same kind of pressure has been levied against the Boy Scouts to accept homosexuals as scoutmasters.

The rhetoric of gay-rights activism portrays homosexuality in wholly non-moral terms: it is an "alternate lifestyle," a matter of one's "sexual orientation." At the heart of the argument is the notion that one's sexual behavior is not a matter of choice. Homosexual tendencies are determined by genetic, not environmental causes—or so the argument goes—and therefore homosexuality cannot be inherently immoral. But in the first place, researchers have not been able to establish that homosexual tendencies have any genetic causes. Even if such a cause could be established,

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<sup>8</sup>Dennis A. Williams and Susan Agrest, "A School for Homosexuals," *Newsweek* (17 June 1985), 93.

<sup>9</sup>"Quotable," *Daily News* (3 November 1993), 6.

however, would that alter the fact that God's Word declares homosexuality to be immoral? Humanistic psychopathology has been attempting for years to blame all sorts of sinful behavior—alcoholism, drug addiction, habitual criminality, and sexual perversion—on genetic causes. That whole line of argument misses the obvious point that Scripture clearly teaches we are all born utterly sinful. Everyone has an inborn tendency to sin. That does not release us from the guilt of sinful actions.

And what is the next “alternate lifestyle” or “sexual orientation” to be legitimized? Sadomasochism—sex mixed with brutality? Bestiality—sex with animals? Necrophilia—sex with corpses? Or perhaps pedophilia—sex with children?

You might be shocked to know that homosexual pedophiles already have an advocacy group: NAMBLA—“National American Man Boy Love Association.” NAMBLA's slogan is “Sex by eight, before it's too late.” The organization, which operates openly under constitutional protection, even publishes a newsletter for members all across the country. The publisher of that paper is a schoolteacher!

Others believe incest should be legalized and encouraged. The Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SEICUS) has circulated a paper suggesting that “moral and religious pronouncements with respect to incest” are all wrong. Guilt about breaking the taboo is actually more harmful than the practice itself, the paper says. It complains that the incest taboo “has prevented scientific investigation,” and calls for those with “the guts to find out what is really happening” to launch an aggressive program of incest research.<sup>10</sup> SEICUS, by the way, is the same group that has been so influential in setting the sex-education agenda for public schools nationwide.

*What is most distressing is that many churches and denominations are now ordaining practicing homosexuals to the ministry.*

Society has become so tolerant that no behavior, it seems, is too perverted to be openly advocated. All of this is frightening evidence that God has abandoned our sinful society to its own degrading passions. Humanism has dehumanized our culture.

What is most distressing is that many churches and denominations are now ordaining practicing homosexuals to the ministry. The homosexual community even has its own denominations, some of which profess to be evangelical. More and more people within the evangelical community are voicing the opinion that homosexuality may not really be sinful after all. Many church leaders seem reluctant to take an uncompromising biblical stand.

But Scripture is clear. The Bible condemns homosexuality in explicit and undeniable terms. The Old Testament law grouped homosexuality with incest, bestiality, and other perversions, and the penalty for its practice was death (Lev. 20:13, cf. vv. 11–16). In Romans 1, Paul clearly teaches that homosexual practices are “indecent acts” (v. 27), driven by “degrading passions” (v. 26). The apostle listed homosexuality with the lowest forms of human degradation: “those who are lawless and rebellious ... , the ungodly and sinners ... , the unholy and profane ... , those who kill their fathers or

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin DeMott, “The Pro-Incest Lobby,” *Psychology Today* (March 1980), 11.

mothers ... , murderers and immoral men and *homosexuals* and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching” (1 Tim. 1:9–10, emphasis added). He wrote, “Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor *homosexuals*, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9–10, emphasis added).

11. According to **Romans 2: 1 - 4** is there any escape?

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Is there no hope for homosexuals? Thankfully, there *is* hope. Those who repent and are reborn in Christ can be freed from the sins that would otherwise destroy them. Immediately after giving that long list of the kinds of people who will not inherit the kingdom, Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, “*Such were some of you*; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (v. 11, emphasis added).

Unrepentant homosexuals, according to Scripture, “receiv[e] in their own persons the due penalty of their error” (**Rom. 1:27**). And the society that tolerates such sins is judged as well. What is “the due penalty of their error”? The consequences of their sin. AIDS is certainly one aspect of that. But an even worse judgment, the final temporal blow from the hand of a righteous God, is when He “[gives] them over to a depraved mind” (v. 28). They bottom out spiritually as well as morally. The conscience seems to vanish completely. They can indulge themselves in the evil acts they so love—“those things which are not proper”—until they fill themselves up with unrighteousness.

#### *The Death of the Conscience*

It is unsettling to see how precisely the decline of our society parallels Paul’s description of the downward spiral of sin. Maurice Roberts has written,

The wheel of history has come full-circle. We are, as a civilization, rotating back to the state of affairs depicted by the apostle Paul in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans ....

The time was when Bible commentators expounded Romans chapter 1 more or less from the standpoint of the first century of the Roman world only. But that day has gone forever. The modern Christian in the West can now see himself as much in the arena of a reprobate society as did the apostles. The state of modern religion and morals exactly parallels that of the apostolic age and it is summed up in the one word: *Decadence*. Pagan Rome could teach modern man very little that he does not know already about sophisticated wickedness. Pagan Greece, pagan Egypt, and pagan Babylon might even learn a thing or two from this generation about how to shun gospel-light and add to the mountains of man’s provocation.

What makes the Bible-reader saddest of all is to see that society today has learnt nothing from the past or from two thousand years of Bible



production and printing, but is repeating the very vices which always provoke God to give the world over to its own sensuality and self-destruction.

*The Banner of Truth, "God Gave Them Up" - Maruice Roberts*

Perhaps even more distressing is the realization that we have already reached that final stage. Conscience has been silenced. Nothing is left to instruct people's behavior but their own depraved minds. The mind becomes a tool of lust unrestrained:

Just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (**Rom. 1:28–32**).

For the third time in the space of five verses, Paul has used the word *paradidōmi*, "gave them over." First he said, "God gave them over ... to impurity" (v. 24); then, "God gave them over to degrading passions" (v. 26); and now, "God gave them over to a depraved mind" (v. 28). Notice the downward progression. Again, it exactly parallels the decline of contemporary society over the past three or four decades. Who can read those verses and deny that they describe our own society right now with an uncanny precision? The mind is morally useless. It cannot discern right from wrong, good from evil. We might assume that someone would figure out that a biblical moral standard would correct much that is wrong with our society, but that simple, rational idea escapes the reprobate mind. Confirmed sinners cannot think logically about moral issues. The conscience itself is victimized!

In a final act of temporal judgment, God has utterly abandoned people to the wickedness they love so much: "unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, [and] malice," so that society is filled with "gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful" (**Romans 1: 29 - 31**).

The word translated "unloving" in that list is *astorgos*, literally meaning "without natural affection"—and it is so translated in the King James Version. It speaks of those who lack instinctive love for their own families—such as mothers who abandon their children, husbands who beat their wives, children who despise their parents, fathers who molest their children, or brothers and sisters who loathe one another. Our society is rife with such wrongdoing; perhaps no other description would better characterize contemporary culture than to say people lack natural affection.

The other items in Paul's list—such as greed, envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, slander, insolence, arrogance, pride, inventive evildoing, disobedience to parents, mercilessness, and hatred of God—perfectly catalog the most visible traits of modern society. Not that previous generations have been free of such evils. But unlike our ancestors, people in our day openly exhibit such sins with a

shameless arrogance. “They not only do [those things], but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (v. 32). Something is seriously, desperately wrong with our culture.

People who follow the culture rather than obey God’s Word are utterly without excuse. “They know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death,” Paul writes (v. 32). Their own consciences witness against them. They may suppress their sense of guilt now, but when they must give account to God, their own consciences will stand against them.

*Civilization as we know it has reached the deepest level of corruption and abides under a sentence of divine condemnation.*

Those who deal falsely with their own consciences place themselves under God’s holy wrath even in this life. “God [gives] them over to a depraved mind” (v. 28). In other words, it turns out that the damage they do to their own consciences *is* God’s immediate judgment against them. “This is the judgment,” Jesus said, “that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil” (Jn. 3:19). Those who reject the light are condemned to live in darkness. God gives them over to their own depravity, and their conscience ceases to function correctly.

It is a wretched and horrifying state of affairs. Our society openly condones and defends the worst kinds of evil. Civilization as we know it has reached the deepest level of corruption and abides under a sentence of divine condemnation. People’s consciences have been seared, debased, obstructed, repressed, and overturned. Without a functioning conscience, people are destined only to sink deeper and deeper into wickedness. Humanity is merely storing up wrath against the day of wrath (cf. Rom. 2:5).

Is there hope? For those willing to repent and follow Christ, there is. They can “be saved from this perverse generation” (Acts 2:40). Their consciences can be renewed and cleansed (Heb. 9:14). They can become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17).

Can society itself be saved? Certainly not without full-scale revival. Unless multitudes turn to Christ, the downward spiral is certain to continue. With so many dampened consciences and hardened hearts, it would take a revival of unprecedented proportions to reverse the downward direction of our culture. The problems are spiritual and cannot be solved through politics or education. Christians who believe political activism can reverse the trends in our society do not understand the nature of the problem. True believers must realize that the state of our society is the result of the righteous judgment of God. God has not commissioned His people to reconstruct society. We are not called to expend our energies for moral reform. We are salt—a preservative for a decaying generation (Matt. 5:13). And we are lights designed to shine in a way that enables people who see our good works to glorify our heavenly Father (vv. 14–16). In other words, our primary task is to preach the truth of God’s Word, live in obedience to that truth, and to keep ourselves unstained by the world (Jas. 1:27). Our influence on society must be the fruit of that kind of living, not the product of fleshly energy or political clout.

What we can do, and *must* do, is keep our own consciences pure. We must saturate our minds and hearts with the truth of Scripture, and refuse to yield to the spirit of our age. To do that, we must understand our own sinfulness and know how to deal with our sins.

### **PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK:**

Read Chapter 2 – “The Decrees Of God”

1. Describe the decree of God in your own words.

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2. How do God’s decrees differ from the decisions and government of man?

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3. Why is it important to tread carefully when we consider God’s sovereign decree and sin? What biblical teachings must we affirm and what errors must we avoid?

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4. In light of what the author describes in this chapter, how would you respond to someone who claimed that God’s decree makes humans into some sort of puppet or robot?

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5. How is the wisdom of God’s decree both difficult at times and comforting at other times?

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6. Take a moment and contemplate the eternally decreed work of Christ on your behalf (consider passages like Matthew 25:34, Acts 2:23, Ephesians 1:3-4, and 1 Peter 1:20). Describe the effect of this aspect of God’s grace on you.

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# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 3 – 19 December 2010

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## THE DECREES OF GOD

The decree of God is His purpose or determination with respect to future things. We have used the singular number as Scripture does.

**Romans 8: 28** - 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** (*singular*).

29 For whom He foreknew, He also **predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;

30 and whom He **predestined**, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

**Ephesians 3: 8** – To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

9 and to bring to light what is the administration of **the mystery** which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;

10 in order that **the manifold wisdom** of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

11 This was in accordance with **the eternal purpose** (*singular*) which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

There was only one act of His infinite mind about future things. But we speak as if there had been many, because our minds are only capable of thinking of *successive* revolutions, as thoughts and occasions arise, or in reference to the various *objects* of His decree, which being many seem to us to require a distinct purpose for each one. But an infinite understanding does not proceed by steps, from one stage to another. This is illustrated by James who, in the council of Jerusalem, has the final word concerning the matter of dealing with the Gentiles. In his response, James specifically delineates the fact that there has *ALWAYS* been one plan which has been continually revealed across the ages:

**Acts 15: 18** - Known unto God are *all* His works, from the beginning of the world

### What are the decrees of God?

The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 7

The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins with a description of God's being all-in-all from the point of view of His being and person. Then it continues with a consideration of His working all-in-all, and for introductory purposes begins with the question of the doctrine of the decree. This is indeed the true and proper place to put this doctrine in relation to the others because of our conception of God as a rational, intelligent being who is a wise builder, who has an idea of His works before He does them. It is clear that God works in time and therefore we suppose that He intended to do so before time.

*The Decrees of God - Samuel Willard  
Modernised by William Carson*

The term "decree" is liable to some misapprehension and objection, because it conveys the idea of an edict, or of some compulsory determination. "Purpose" has been suggested as a better word. "Plan" will sometimes be still more suitable. The mere use of these words will remove from many some difficulties and prejudices which make them unwilling to accept this doctrine. They perceive that, in the creation, preservation, and government of the world, God must have had a plan, and that that plan must have been just, wise and holy, tending both to His own glory and the happiness of His creatures.

*Abstract of Systematic Theology – James P. Boyce*

1. Describe the decree of God in your own words.

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The Scriptures make mention of the decrees of God in many passages, and under a variety of terms.

**Psalms 2: 1** - Why are the nations in an uproar, And the peoples devising a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed:

3 "Let us tear their fetters apart, And cast away their cords from us!"

4 He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.

5 Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury:

6 "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain."

7 "I will surely tell of the **decree** of the LORD: He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee.

8 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Thy possession.

9 'Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.'"

10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth.

11 Worship the LORD with reverence, And rejoice with trembling.

12 Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

This very passage alone gives illustration to the timelessness of God's designing purposes.

**Acts 2: 22** - "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know--

23 this Man, delivered up by **the predetermined plan and foreknowledge** of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

24 "And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since ***it was impossible*** for Him to be held in its power.

Romans 8:29 that He also did predestinate

God's decrees are called His "counsel" to signify they are consummately wise. They are called God's "will" to show He was under no control, but acted according to His own pleasure. When a man's will is the rule of his conduct, it is usually capricious and unreasonable; but *wisdom* is always associated with "will" in the Divine proceedings, and accordingly, God's decrees are said to be "the counsel of His own will"

**Ephesians 1: 8b** - In all wisdom and insight

9 He made known to us **the mystery of His will**, according to His **kind intention which He purposed in Him**

10 with a view to **an administration** suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him

11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will**,

12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

God "works all things after the counsel of his will" (Ephesians 1:11). This "all things" includes the fall of sparrows (Matthew 10:29), the rolling of dice (Proverbs 16:33), the slaughter of his people (Psalm 44:11), the decisions of kings (Proverbs 21:1), the failing of sight (Exodus 4:11), the sickness of children (2 Samuel 12:15), the loss and gain of money (1 Samuel 2:7), the suffering of saints (1 Peter 4:19), the completion of travel plans (James 4:15), the persecution of Christians (Hebrews 12:4-7), the repentance of souls (2 Timothy 2:25), the gift of faith (Philippians 1:29), the pursuit of holiness (Philippians 3:12-13), the growth of believers (Hebrews 6:3), the giving of life and the taking in death (1 Samuel 2:6), and the crucifixion of his Son (Acts 4:27-28).

*Seeing God In The 9/11 Disaster - John Piper*

The decrees of God relate to all future things without exception: whatever is done in time, was foreordained before time began. God's purpose was concerned with everything, whether great or small, whether good or evil, although with reference to the latter we must be careful to state that while God is the Orderer and Controller of sin, He is *not* the Author of it in the same way that He is the Author of good. Sin could not proceed from a holy God by positive and direct creation, but only by decretive permission and negative action. God's decree is as comprehensive as His government, extending to all creatures and all events. It was concerned about our life and death; about our state in time, and our state in eternity. As God works *all* things after the counsel of His own will, we learn from His works what His counsel is (was), as we judge of an architect's plan by inspecting the building which was erected under his directions.

2. Why is it important to tread carefully when we consider God's sovereign decree and sin? What biblical teachings must we affirm and what errors must we avoid?

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God did not merely decree to make man, place him upon the earth, and then leave him to his own uncontrolled guidance; instead, He fixed all the circumstances in the lot of individuals, and all the particulars which will comprise the history of the human race from its commencement to its close. He did not merely decree that general laws should be established for the government of the world, but He settled the *application* of those laws to all particular cases. Our days are numbered, and so are the hairs of our heads. We may learn what is the *extent* of the Divine decrees from the dispensations of providence, in which they are executed. The care of Providence reaches to the most insignificant creatures, and the most minute events—the death of a sparrow, and the fall of a hair.

Let us now consider some of the *properties* of the Divine decrees:

**A. First, they are eternal.**

To suppose any of them to be made in time, is to suppose that some new occasion has occurred, some unforeseen event or combination of circumstances has arisen, which has induced the Most High to form a new resolution. This would argue that the knowledge of the deity is limited, and that He is growing wiser in the progress of time—which would be horrible blasphemy. No man who believes that the Divine understanding is infinite, comprehending the past, the present, and the future, will ever assent to the erroneous doctrine of temporal decrees. God is not ignorant of future events which will be executed by human volitions; He has foretold them in innumerable instances, and prophecy is but the *manifestation* of His eternal prescience. Scripture affirms that believers were chosen in Christ before the world began (Eph. 1:4), yea, that grace was "given" to them then (2 Tim. 1:9).

**1 Corinthians 2: 7** - No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

**B. Second, the decrees of God are wise.**

Wisdom is shown in the selection of the best possible ends and of the fittest means of accomplishing them. That this character belongs to the decrees of God is evident from what we know of them. They are disclosed to us *by their execution*, and every proof of wisdom in the works of God is a proof of the wisdom of the *plan*, in conformity to which they are performed. As the Psalmist declared, "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all" (Ps. 104:24). It is indeed but a very small part of them which falls under our observation, yet, we ought to proceed here as we do in other cases, and judge of the whole by the specimen, of what is unknown, by what is known. He who perceives the workings of admirable skill in the parts of a machine which he has an opportunity to examine, is naturally led to believe that the other parts are equally admirable. In like manner should we satisfy our minds as to God's works when doubts obtrude themselves upon us, and repel the objections which may be suggested by something which we cannot reconcile to *our* notions of what is good and wise. When we reach the bounds of the finite and gaze toward the mysterious realm of the infinite, let us exclaim. "O the depth of the riches! both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom. 11:33).

**C. Third, they are free.**

**Isaiah 40: 13 – 14** - Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counselor hath taught Him? With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and showed to Him the way of understanding?

God was alone when He made His decrees, and His determinations were influenced by no external cause. He was free to decree or not to decree, and to decree one thing and not another. This liberty we must ascribe to Him who is supreme, independent, and sovereign in all His doings.

An idea in man is first impressed upon him and afterwards expressed in things, but in God it is only expressed, not impressed, because it does not come from anywhere else.

*The Decrees of God - Dr. William Ames*

**D. Fourth, they are absolute and unconditional.**

The execution of them is not suspended upon any condition which may, or may not be, performed. In every instance where God has decreed an end, He has also decreed every means to that end. The One who decreed the salvation of His elect also decreed to work faith in them

**2 Thessalonians 2: 13** - We should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you **from the beginning for** salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

**14** And **it was for this He called you** through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**15** So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

**Isaiah 46: 8** – "Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. *(N.B. That He is in control is a comfort to the saint, and a terror to the rebel.)*

**9** "Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me,

**10** **Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';**

**11** **Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."**

**Psalms 135: 6** - The LORD does whatever pleases Him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

These things could not be, if His counsel depended upon a condition which might not be performed. But God "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).



### E. Fifth, they are unchanging.

This decree is a firm and unchangeable determination on the part of God. Therefore in the working of these acts we can see the unchanging nature of God. In everything he does He stands by His decree,

**Numbers 23: 19** - God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfil?

**Proverbs 19: 21** - Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

**Psalms 102: 25** - Of old Thou didst found the earth; and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. 26 Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed.

27 But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end.

28 The children of Thy servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before Thee.

### F. The decree has an ultimate purpose.

The purpose or end of the counsel is the glory of God Himself, i.e. the goodness or perfection of God which is manifest in His efficiency and shines forth in His works.

**Ephesians 1: 5** - He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

3. How do God's decrees differ from the decisions and government of man?

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Side by side with the immutability and invincibility of God's decrees, Scripture plainly teaches that man is a responsible creature and answerable for his actions. And if our thoughts are formed from God's Word the maintenance of the one will not lead to the denial of the other. That there is a real difficulty in defining where the one ends and the other begins, is freely granted. This is ever the case where there is a conjunction of the Divine and the human. Real prayer is indited by the Spirit, yet it is also the cry of a human heart. The Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, yet were they written by men who were something more than machines in the hand of the Spirit. Christ is both God and man. He is Omniscient, yet "increased in wisdom" (Luke 2:52). He was Almighty, yet was "crucified through weakness" (2 Cor. 13:4). He was the Prince of life, yet He died. High mysteries are these, yet faith receives them unquestioningly.

4. In light of what the author describes in this chapter, how would you respond to someone who claimed that God's decree makes humans into some sort of puppet or robot?

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It has often been pointed out in the past that every objection made against the eternal decrees of God applies with equal force against His eternal foreknowledge:

Whether God has decreed all things that ever come to pass or not, all that own the being of a God, own that He knows all things beforehand. Now, it is self-evident that if He knows all things beforehand, He either doth approve of them or doth not approve of them; that is, He either is willing they should be, or He is not willing they should be. But to will that they *should* be is to decree them.

*Of God's Moral Government - Jonathan Edwards*

Finally, attempt to assume and then contemplate the opposite. To *deny* the Divine decrees would be to predicate a world and all its concerns regulated by *undesigned* chance or blind fate. Then what peace, what assurance, what comfort would there be for our poor hearts and minds? What refuge would there be to fly to in the hour of need and trial? None at all. There would be nothing better than the black darkness and abject horror of atheism. O my reader, how thankful should we be that everything is determined by infinite wisdom and goodness! What praise and gratitude are due unto God for His Divine decrees. It is because of them that "*we know* that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Well may we exclaim, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: *to whom he glory* forever. Amen" (Rom 11:36).

5. How is the wisdom of God's decree both difficult at times and comforting at other times?

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6. Take a moment and contemplate the eternally decreed work of Christ on your behalf (consider passages like Matthew 25:34, Acts 2:23, Ephesians 1:3-4, and 1 Peter 1:20). Describe the effect of this aspect of God's grace on you.

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- a. That there are no random events with respect to God.
- b. That all things that come to pass are the product of infinite wisdom.
- c. That no decrees of God can be unrighteous, but all are just and holy. His sacred and divine will which is the rule of the decree is also the rule of all things. He who wills things because they seem good in His sight, He who is not accountable to any man, He whose will is supreme and holy, cannot do wrong. It is therefore impudent boldness for us to find fault with Him.
- d. To see our nothingness without God. Apart from Him we are nothing.
- e. To adore the wisdom of God in all things that happen in this world, and that happen to us in particular. We are apt to complain, but remember: God's infinite plan ordered them.

f. To sanctify God in all the changes of our lives. Let us for this reason acknowledge His hand in everything. We must not ascribe them to chance as if they just happened apart from the intention of the First Cause, which is a blasphemy against providence. We must not concentrate our thoughts too much on the instruments, either in good or evil events, forgetting their absolute dependence on the First Cause. Acknowledge His hand in the sending and disposing of all things. Let us recognize His sovereign prerogative to order all as He sees fit; that He is Lord and has the right to determine all things according to His pleasure. Therefore learn quietly to submit to the all-controlling hand of God. Let this silence us in all things: It is the Lord's will (Psalm 39:9).

g. To commend all the things in our lives to Him: not anxiously fearing what may come to pass, but believing all shall be as He has in wisdom appointed.

Other works cited in this lesson:

**The Decrees of God** by Samuel Willard; modernised by William Carson

**The Decrees of God** by Dr. William Ames

**Of God's Moral Government** by Jonathan Edwards

**Seeing God In The 9/11 Disaster** by John Piper

**Abstract of Systematic Theology**; Chapter 13 – James P. Boyce

# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 4 – 26 December 2010

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## THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

God is omniscient. He knows everything: everything possible, everything actual; all events, all creatures, God the past, the present and the future. He is perfectly acquainted with every detail in the life of every being in heaven, in earth and in hell.

**Daniel 2: 22** – He knoweth what is in the darkness

**Psalms 147: 5** - Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit

Nothing escapes His notice, nothing can be hidden from Him, nothing is forgotten by Him.

*Note to teacher: Have class go to text and call out the obvious references to omniscience.*

**Psalms 139: 1** (For the choir director. A Psalm of David.) O LORD, Thou hast searched me and known me.

2 Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar.

3 Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art intimately acquainted with all my ways.

4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, Thou dost know it all.

5 Thou hast enclosed me behind and before, and laid Thy hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it.

7 Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there.

9 If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,

10 Even there Thy hand will lead me, and Thy right hand will lay hold of me.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night,"

12 Even the darkness is not dark to Thee, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to Thee.

13 For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb.

14 I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth.

16 Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.

17 How precious also are Thy thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with Thee.

19 O that Thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God; depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed.

20 For they speak against Thee wickedly, and Thine enemies take Thy name in vain.

21 Do I not hate those who hate Thee, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against Thee?

22 I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts;

24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

His knowledge is perfect. He never errs, never changes, never overlooks anything.

**Hebrews 4: 13** - Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do

*Question # 1* - What is your response to the fact that God knows every part of you and your life in the deepest way possible?

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How solemn is this fact: nothing can be concealed from God!

**Ezekiel 11: 5** - For I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them

Though He be invisible to us, we are not so to Him. Neither the darkness of night, the closest curtains, nor the deepest dungeon can hide any sinner from the eyes of Omniscience.

*Note to teacher: Ask class what biblical references they can remember that testify to God's awareness of peoples sins.*

The trees of the garden were not able to conceal our first parents. No human eye beheld Cain murder his brother, but his Maker witnessed his crime. Sarah might laugh derisively in the seclusion of her tent, yet was it heard by Jehovah. Achan stole a wedge of gold and carefully hid it in the earth, but God brought it to light. David was at much pains to cover up his wickedness, but ere long the all-seeing God sent one of His servants to say to him, "Thou art the man! And to writer and reader is also said, Be sure *your* sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23).

Men would strip Deity of His omniscience if they could—what a proof that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7)! The wicked do as naturally hate this Divine perfection as much as they are naturally compelled to acknowledge it. They wish there might be no Witness of their sins, no Searcher of their hearts, no Judge of their deeds. They seek to banish such a God from their thoughts.

**Hosea 7: 2** - They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness

How solemn is Psalm 90:8!

**Psalm 90: 8** - Thou hast placed our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the ight of Thy presence.

Good reason has every Christ-rejecter for trembling before it: Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our *secret* sins in the light of Thy countenance.

But to the believer, the fact of God's omniscience is a truth fraught with much comfort. Believers say exactly what Job said:

**Job 23: 10** - But *He knoweth* the way that I take

It may be profoundly mysterious to me, quite incomprehensible to my friends, but "*He knoweth!*" In times of weariness and weakness believers assure themselves

**Psalm 103: 14** - He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust

In times of doubt and suspicion they *appeal* to this very attribute saying, "*Search me*, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23,24). In time of sad failure, when our actions have belied our hearts, when our deeds have repudiated our devotion, and the searching question comes to us, "Lovest thou Me?;" we say, as Peter did, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou *knowest* that I love Thee" (John 21:17).

*Question # 2* - How does Christ turn God's perfect knowledge from being a frightening and repulsive thought to being a comforting and joyous truth?

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There is no cause for fearing that the petitions of the righteous will not be heard, or that their sighs and tears shall escape the notice of God, since He knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. There is no danger of the individual saint being overlooked amidst the multitude of supplicants who daily and hourly present their various petitions, for an *infinite* Mind is as capable as paying the same attention to millions as if only one individual were seeking its attention. So too the lack of appropriate language, the inability to give expression to the deepest longing of the soul, will not jeopardize our prayers, for "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isa. 65:24).

*Question # 3* - How does God's infinite knowledge serve to encourage prayer rather than discourage it? Explain.

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God not only knows whatsoever has happened in the past in every part of His vast domains, and He is not only thoroughly acquainted with everything that is now transpiring throughout the entire universe, but He is also perfectly cognizant with every event, from the least to the greatest, that ever will happen in the ages to come. God's knowledge of the future is as complete as is His knowledge of the past and the present, and that, because the future depends entirely upon Himself. Were it in anywise possible for something to occur apart from either the direct agency or permission of God, then that something would be independent of Him, and He would at once cease to be Supreme.

Now the Divine knowledge of the future is not a mere abstraction, but something which is inseparably connected with and accompanied by His purpose. God has Himself designed whatsoever shall yet be, and what He has designed *must* be effectuated. As His most sure Word affirms, "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth: and *none* can stay His hand" (Dan. 4:35). And again, "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that *shall* stand" (Prov. 19:21). T

Question # 4 - Where in Scripture would you go to refute the view that God doesn't know the future with absolute certainty (a view known in theological circles as open theism)?

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*Some quick suggestions for the teacher on this:*

<i>God is sovereign over the entire universe:</i>	<i>Ps 103:19; <b>Rom 8:28</b>; Eph 1:11</i>
<i>God is sovereign over all of nature:</i>	<i>Ps 135:6-7; Mt 5:45; 6:25-30</i>
<i>God is sovereign over angels &amp; Satan:</i>	<i>Ps 103:20-21; Job 1:12</i>
<i>God is sovereign over nations:</i>	<i>Ps 47:7-9; Dan 2:20-21; 4:34-35</i>
<i>God is sovereign over human beings:</i>	<i>1 Sam 2:6-7; Gal 1:15-16</i>
<i>God is sovereign over animals:</i>	<i>Ps 104:21-30; 1 Ki 17:4-6</i>
<i>God is sovereign over "accidents":</i>	<i>Pr 16:33; Jon 1:7; Mt 10:29</i>
<i>God is sovereign over free acts of men:</i>	<i>Ex 3:21; 12:25-36; Ez 7:27</i>
<i>God is sovereign over acts of men &amp; Satan:</i>	<i>2 Sam 24:1; 1 Chr 21:1; Gen 45:5; 50:20</i>

*Isaiah 46:9-10*

*Hebrews 6:17*

*Isaiah 14: 26 – 27 - This is the plan devised against the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?*

Nothing relating to the future is in anywise uncertain so far as the actualization of God's counsels are concerned. None of His decrees are left contingent either on creatures or secondary causes. There is no future event which is only a mere possibility, that is, something which may or may not come to pass.

**Acts 15: 18** - *Known* unto God are *all* His works from the beginning

Whatever God has decreed is inexorably certain, for He is without variableness, or shadow, of turning. (James 1:17). Therefore we are told at the very beginning of that book which unveils to us so much of the future, of this certainty.

**Revelation 1: 1** - Things which *must* shortly come to pass

The perfect knowledge of God is exemplified and illustrated in every prophecy recorded in His Word. In the Old Testament are to be found scores of predictions concerning the history of Israel, which were fulfilled to their minutest detail, centuries after they were made. Such prophecies could only have been given by One who knew the end from the beginning, and whose knowledge rested upon the unconditional certainty of the accomplishment of everything foretold. Both Old and New Testament contain many other announcements yet future, and they too "must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).

Question # 5 - List five things that come to mind as you think about the scope of God's knowledge (e.g. every hair on every head).

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## God's Distinct Knowledge

God's knowledge differs from ours in 5 ways.

### A. God's knowledge is intuitive, not discursive

Our knowledge is discursive in that it comes by way of observation, reasoning, comparison, induction, deduction, and so on. In other words, *we learn*. But God's knowledge is intuitive, by which is meant that it is innate and immediate. God does not learn: He simply knows. He neither discovers nor forgets. (*This is one element of divine omniscience that is challenged by open theists.*)

### B. God's knowledge is simultaneous, not successive

He sees things at once and in their totality, whereas we know only as the objects of knowledge are brought before us, one bit after another. With God the act of perception is complete and instantaneous. God thinks about all things at once.

If He should wish to tell us the number of grains of sand on the seashore or the number of stars in the sky, He would not have to count them all quickly like some kind of giant computer, nor would He have to call the number to mind because it was something He had not thought about for a time. Rather, He knows all things at once. All of these facts and all other things that He knows are always fully present in His consciousness

*Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*  
Wayne A. Grudem, Jeff Purswell

### C. God's knowledge is independent, not dependent

He does not receive his knowledge from anyone or anything external to himself:

**Isaiah 40: 13-14** - Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding?

### D. God's knowledge is infallible, not subject to error

God is always correct in what he knows.

### E. God's knowledge is infinite, not partial

**Acts 15: 18** - Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world

God's knows exhaustively all his own deeds and plans. He also knows us thoroughly and exhaustively. No secret of the human heart, no thought of the mind or feeling of the soul escapes his gaze.



Psychologists and psychoanalysts speak of deep areas of subconscious experience of which human beings are hardly aware. But God knows all men thoroughgoingly, psychologists and psychoanalysts and theologians included.

*Uncited work - Carl Henry*

Some argue there are things God does not, indeed cannot, know. Since God does not have a physical body (at least prior to the incarnation), it would seem he cannot know anything that is known through the use of the five senses. He cannot know what it is to feel hot or cold. He cannot smell a rose or hear a symphony or taste food, at least not in the way those who do so through physical sense organs do. Feinberg thus defines omniscience:

Divine omniscience is ability to know everything that a being with God's attributes can know. Since his attributes are all perfections, they do not likely preclude his knowing something He should know as the Maximally-Great Being

*No One Like Him – John S. Feinberg*

Do you agree? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

*N.B. While a good discussion point and will generate some thought, the incarnation makes this a moot argument either way since Jesus was fully man and fully God and experienced life just as His creation.*

It should, however, be pointed out that neither God's knowledge nor His cognition of the future, considered simply in themselves, are causative. Nothing has ever come to pass, or ever will, merely because God knew it. The *cause* of all things is the *will* of God. The man who really believes the Scriptures knows beforehand that the seasons will continue to follow each other with unfailing regularity to the end of earth's history (Gen. 8:22), yet his knowledge is not the cause of their succession. So God's knowledge does not arise from things because they are or will be but because He has *ordained* them to be. God knew and foretold the crucifixion of His Son many hundreds of years before He became incarnate, and this, because in the Divine purpose, He was a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world: hence we read of His being "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

**Question # 6** - Describe how God's knowledge of the future as seen in prophecy connects with His purposes and sovereignty (see Isaiah 46:8-11).

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**Isaiah 46: 8** - "Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors.  
9 "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me,

10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';  
11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.

A word or two by way of application. The infinite knowledge of God should fill us with *amazement*. How far exalted above the wisest man is the Lord! None of us knows what a day may bring forth, but all futurity is open to His omniscient gaze. The infinite knowledge of God ought to fill us with holy awe. Nothing we do, say, or even think, escapes the cognizance of Him with whom we have to do.

**Proverbs 15:3** - The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good

What a curb this would be unto us, did we but meditate upon it more frequently! Instead of acting recklessly, we should say with Hagar, "Thou God seest me" (Gen. 16:13). The apprehension of God's infinite knowledge should fill the Christian with *adoration*. The whole of my life stood open to His view from the beginning. He foresaw my every fall, my every sin, my every backsliding; yet, nevertheless, fixed His heart upon me. Oh, how the realization of this should bow me in wonder and worship before Him!

Consider how great it is to know the thoughts and intentions, and works of one man from the beginning to the end of his life; to foreknow all these before the being of this man, when he was lodged afar off in the loins of his ancestors, yea, of Adam. How much greater is it to foreknow and know the thoughts and works of three or four men, of a whole village or neighborhood!

It is greater still to know the imaginations and actions of such a multitude of men as are contained in London, Paris, or Constantinople; how much greater still to know the intentions and practices, the clandestine contrivances of so many millions, that have, do, or shall swarm in all quarters of the world, every person of them having millions of thoughts, desires, designs, affections, and actions! Let this attribute, then, make the blessed God honourable in our eyes and adorable in all our affections. . . .  
*Adore God for this wonderful perfection!*

*The Existence and Attributes of God - Stephen Charnock*

A proper understanding of this divine attribute ought also to have a profound impact on our humility as well.

There is nothing man is more apt to be proud of than his knowledge; it is a perfection he glories in; but if our own knowledge of the little outside and barks of things puffs us up, the consideration of the infiniteness of God's knowledge should abate the tumor. As our beings are nothing in regard to the infiniteness of his essence, so our knowledge is nothing in regard of the vastness of his understanding. We have a spark of being, but nothing to the heat of the sun; we have a drop of knowledge, but nothing to the divine ocean. What a vain thing is it for a shallow brook to boast of its streams, before a sea whose depths are unfathomable! As it is a vanity to brag of our strength when we remember the power of God, and of our prudence when we glance upon the wisdom of God, so it is no less a vanity to boast of our knowledge when we think of the understanding and knowledge of God

*The Existence and Attributes of God - Stephen Charnock*

**Question # 7** - Does God's knowledge bring you to amazement, awe, and adoration? Explain.

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Other works cited in this lesson:

- **Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith** by Wayne A. Grudem and Jeff Purswell
- **The Omniscience of God** by Sam Storms
- **No One Like Him** by John S. Feinberg
- **The Existence and Attributes of God** by Stephen Charnock

#### **PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK:**

Read Chapter 4 – “The Foreknowledge Of God”

**Question # 1** - Why do you think the topic of foreknowledge is so controversial? What kind of controversy have you experienced regarding this issue?

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*Question # 2* - Do you agree with the tone the author takes towards those who differ from him? What kinds of attitudes are important in these kinds of discussions?

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*Question # 3* - How does Scripture's teaching on the sinfulness of man make the idea of God foreknowing our self-produced faith evidently false?

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*Question # 4* - Summarize what Scripture means when it speaks of God foreknowing. What are the key elements in the passages cited?

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*Question # 5* - How does the rich personal nature of the foreknowledge of God serve to magnify the grace of God in your mind?

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*Question # 6* - *How does the saving work of Christ relate to God foreknowing His people?*

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*Question # 7* - What application do you see in this chapter for what you believe, how you think about yourself, and how you relate to God?

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## The Omniscience of God

- Sam Storms
- Dec 24, 2006
- Series: Attributes of God

*"Great is our Lord and mighty in power;  
his understanding has no limit" (Ps. 147:5)*

There is a growing trend among evangelicals to significantly redefine the content of divine omniscience by eliminating divine foreknowledge. This attempt to reshape the historical orthodox view of God must be addressed. Before doing so, we must first examine the biblical evidence for the nature and extent of God's knowledge.

### A. *God's Knowledge and Ours*

It will help to begin by noting how God's knowledge differs from ours.

1. *God's knowledge is intuitive, not discursive* - Our knowledge is discursive in that it comes by way of observation, reasoning, comparison, induction, deduction, and so on. In other words, *we learn*. But God's knowledge is intuitive, by which is meant that it is innate and immediate. God does not learn: He simply knows. He neither discovers nor forgets. [This is one element of divine omniscience that is challenged by open theists.]

2. *God's knowledge is simultaneous, not successive* - He sees things at once and in their totality, whereas we know only as the objects of knowledge are brought before us, one bit after another. With God the act of perception is complete and instantaneous. God thinks about all things at once.

"If he [God] should wish to tell us the number of grains of sand on the seashore or the number of stars in the sky, he would not have to count them all quickly like some kind of giant computer, nor would he have to call the number to mind because it was something he had not thought about for a time. Rather, he knows all things at once. All of these facts and all other things that he knows are always fully present in his consciousness" (Grudem, 191).

3. *God's knowledge is independent, not dependent* - He does not receive his knowledge from anyone or anything external to himself:

*"Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding?" (Isa. 40:13-14).*

4. *God's knowledge is infallible, not subject to error* - As Ronald Nash has said, "Divine omniscience means that God holds no false beliefs. Not only are all of God's beliefs true, the range of his knowledge is total; He knows all true propositions" (51). God is always correct in what he knows.

5. *God's knowledge is infinite, not partial* - "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). God knows exhaustively all his own deeds and plans. He also knows us thoroughly and exhaustively. No secret of the human heart, no thought of the mind or feeling of the soul escapes his gaze. Carl Henry points out: "Psychologists and psychoanalysts speak of deep areas of subconscious experience of which human beings are hardly aware. But God knows all men thoroughgoingly, psychologists and psychoanalysts and theologians included" (V:268).

Consider David's description of God's knowledge as found in Psalm 139:1-4.

*"O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar. Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all" (Ps. 139:1-4).*

- "Searching" is an anthropomorphic image, for "God knows all things naturally and as a matter of course, and not by any effort on his part. Searching ordinarily implies a measure of ignorance which is removed by observation; of course this is not the case with the Lord; but the meaning of the Psalmist is, that the Lord knows us thoroughly as if he had examined us minutely, and had pried into the most secret corners of our being" (Spurgeon, 258).
- David's choice of words is designed to encompass the totality of his life's activities. God's knowledge extends to every posture, gesture, exercise, pursuit, state, and condition possible. "When I am active and when I am passive and everything in between . . . Thou knowest it all! My most common and casual acts, my most needful and trivial moments . . . none escape Thine eye!" David employs a figure of speech called *merism*, in which polar opposites are used to indicate the totality of all generically related acts, events, localities, and so on.
- Every emotion, feeling, idea, thought, conception, resolve, aim, doubt, motive, perplexity, and anxious moment lies before You like an open book. And you all this "from afar"! The distance between heaven and earth by which men vainly imagine God's knowledge to be circumscribed (limited, bounded) offers no obstacle.
- "Though my thought be invisible to the sight, though as yet I be not myself cognizant of the shape it is assuming, yet thou hast it under thy consideration, and thou perceivest its nature, its source, its drift, its result. Never dost thou misjudge or wrongly interpret me; my inmost thought is perfectly understood by thine impartial mind. Though thou shouldst give but a glance at my heart, and see me as one sees a passing meteor moving afar, yet thou wouldst by that glimpse sum up all the meanings of my soul, so transparent is everything to thy piercing glance" (Spurgeon, 259).
- "All my ways" = every step, every move, every journey, all are under His gaze. What possible hope of concealment is there when God knows what we will say before we do?
- Note especially the implications of v. 4 for divine foreknowledge: before we utter a word, God knows it all (thoroughly, completely, accurately).

Other relevant texts include:

*"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"* (Heb. 4:13).

*"And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts"* (1 Chron. 28:9a).

*"The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good"* (Prov. 15:3).

*"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve'"* (Jer. 17:9-10; cf. also Jer. 16:17; 1 Kings 8:39).

*"You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you"* (Ps. 69:5).

*"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him"* (Mt. 6:8).

*" . . . for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things"* (1 John 3:20).

*"Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord, how much more the hearts of men!"* (Prov. 15:11).

*"Yet Thou, O Lord, knowest all their deadly designs against me; do not forgive their iniquity or blot out their sin from Thy sight"* (Jer. 18:23).

*"Yet, O Lord of hosts, Thou who dost test the righteous, who seest the mind [lit., kidneys] and the heart . . ."* (Jer. 20:12).

*“And they prayed, and said, ‘Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen” (Acts 1:24).*

*“Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and He said to me, ‘Say, thus says the Lord, so you think, house of Israel, for I know your thoughts” (Ezek. 11:5).*

*“Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, and the justice due me escapes the notice of my God’? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable” (Isa. 40:27-28).*

As for God's knowledge of the inner man, see also John 2:25; 21:17; Jer. 11:20; 32:19; Luke 16:15; Rom. 8:27; Ps. 94:9-11; 1 Cor. 3:20; 1 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 2:23; 1 Sam. 16:7; Isa. 66:18; Deut. 31:21; Mt. 9:4; Acts 15:8.

As for God's knowledge of all our activities and ways, see also Job 23:10; 24:23; 31:4; Ps. 1:6; 33:13-15; 37:18; 119:168; Isa. 29:15; 1 Sam. 2:3; Mt. 10:30.

#### B. *Does God Know Everything?*

Some argue there are things God does not, indeed cannot, know. Since God does not have a physical body (at least prior to the incarnation), it would seem he cannot know anything that is known through the use of the five senses. He cannot know what it is to feel hot or cold. He cannot smell a rose or hear a symphony or taste food, at least not in the way those who do so through physical sense organs do. Feinberg thus defines omniscience:

*“Divine omniscience is ability to know everything that a being with God’s attributes can know. Since his attributes are all perfections, they do not likely preclude his knowing something he should know as the maximally-great being” (No One Like Him, 325).*

Do you agree?

#### C. *Divine Foreknowledge*

Four views of divine foreknowledge:

1. Open Theism – God knows both the past and present in exhaustive detail but knows the future only to the degree that the future is logically knowable. God can foreknow what he, God, intends to do independent of human involvement. But God cannot know what we, humans, will do until we do it. God knows the range of possibilities and potentialities but not actualities, insofar as the latter do not exist as objects of knowledge until such time as free moral agents bring them into being. Hence the future is truly “open” for both God and humans.

2. Simple Foreknowledge – Those who advocate this view contend that God “simply” knows what is going to come to pass. The future is not “open” from God’s perspective, but neither is God’s foreknowledge based on his foreordination. God “simply” foreknows what free agents will do.

3. Middle Knowledge – Advocates of this view argue that God foreknows not only what *will* come to pass but also what *would have* come to pass under any and all circumstances in any and all possible worlds. God chose to create *this* world because he foresaw that what would come to pass in *it*, as compared with all other possible worlds, best served his objective of glorifying himself while preserving the freedom of his creatures. This view is based on the belief that God has eternal knowledge of how free moral agents would act in all possible circumstances in all possible worlds.

4. Calvinist View – God *foreknows* everything that will come to pass in the future because he has *foreordained* everything that comes to pass. Humans are free moral agents insofar as they act voluntarily according to their desires. But all such desires and subsequent volitional activity fall within the sovereign and pre-temporal (or eternal) purpose of God.

#### D. *Practical Implications*

Consider how the doctrine of divine omniscience ought to affect our worship and adoration of God:

“Consider how great it is to know the thoughts and intentions, and works of one man from the beginning to the end of his life; to foreknow all these before the being of this man, when he was lodged afar off in the loins of his ancestors, yea, of Adam. How much greater is it to foreknow and know the thoughts and works of three or four men, of a whole village or neighbourhood! It is greater still to know the imaginations and actions of such a multitude of men as are contained in London, Paris, or Constantinople; how much greater still to know the intentions and practices, the clandestine contrivances of so many millions, that have, do, or shall swarm in all quarters of the world, every person of them having millions of thoughts, desires, designs, affections, and actions! Let this attribute, then, make the blessed God honourable in our eyes and adorable in all our affections. . . . *Adore God for this wonderful perfection!*” (Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, pp. 239-40).

A proper understanding of this divine attribute ought also to have a profound impact on our humility. Charnock explains:

“There is nothing man is more apt to be proud of than his knowledge; it is a perfection he glories in; but if our own knowledge of the little outside and barks of things puffs us up, the consideration of the infiniteness of God’s knowledge should abate the tumor. As our beings are nothing in regard to the infiniteness of his essence, so our knowledge is nothing in regard of the vastness of his understanding. We have a spark of being, but nothing to the heat of the sun; we have a drop of knowledge, but nothing to the divine ocean. What a vain thing is it for a shallow brook to boast of its streams, before a sea whose depths are unfathomable! As it is a vanity to brag of our strength when we remember the power of God, and of our prudence when we glance upon the wisdom of God, so it is no less a vanity to boast of our knowledge when we think of the understanding and knowledge of God” (240).

What is our response when we think of God’s knowledge of the secrets of our hearts? What impact does this have on holiness?

“Can a man’s conscience easily and delightfully swallow that which he is sensible falls under the cognizance of God, when it is hateful to the eye of his holiness, and renders the actor odious to him? . . . Temptations have no encouragement to come near him that is constantly armed with the thoughts that his sin is booked in God’s omniscience” (258).

What is even more glorious is that this doctrine which makes us fearful of sin is also the foundation of comfort and assurance. If God is omniscient, then he knows the worst about us, but loves us notwithstanding! The apostle John writes: “This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything” (1 John 3:19-20).

Finally, our trust and hope shall not disappoint, for they are in him who knows all things. Charnock again explains:

“This perfection of God fits him to be a special object of trust. If he were forgetful, what comfort could we have in any promise? How could we depend upon him if he were ignorant of our state? His compassions to pity us, his readiness to relieve us, his power to protect and assist us, would be insignificant, without his omniscience to inform his goodness and direct the arm of his power. . . . You may depend upon his mercy that hath promised, and upon his truth to perform, upon his sufficiency to supply you and his goodness to relieve you, and his righteousness to reward you, because he hath an infinite understanding to know you and your wants, you and your services” (249).



# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 5 – 2 January 2011

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## THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

### Church Controversy

*NOTE TO TEACHER: if you can, get a laptop for class and go to the following site to show the slides of battle of church signboards found at:*

<http://www.quizopolis.com/forum/showthread.php?t=116>

*QUESTION: What disagreements have you lived through? What are some of the more serious things which would cause you to break fellowship with others?*

Today we will discuss what has been controversial. More than colors of hymnals or whether or not to have pads on the pews, this doctrinal distinctive is essential.

What controversies have been engendered by this subject in the past! But what truth of Holy Scripture is there which has not been made the occasion of theological and ecclesiastical battles? The deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His atoning death, His second advent; the believer's justification, sanctification, security; the church, its organization, officers, discipline; baptism, the Lord's supper, and a score of other precious truths might be mentioned. Yet, the controversies which have been waged over them did not close the mouths of God's faithful servants; why, then, should we avoid the vexed question of God's Foreknowledge, because, forsooth, there are some who will charge us with fomenting strife? Let others contend if they will, our duty is to bear witness according to the light vouchsafed us.

*The Attributes Of God – A.W. Pink*

*Question # 1 - Why do you think the topic of foreknowledge is so controversial? What kind of controversy have you experienced regarding this issue?*

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Because this ignorance is so widespread, it is an easy matter for preachers and teachers to palm off perversions of this subject, even upon the people of God. There is only one safeguard against error, and that is to be established in the faith; and for that, there has to be prayerful and diligent study, and a receiving with meekness the engrafted Word of God. Only then are we fortified against the attacks of those who assail us. There are those today who are *misusing* this very truth in order to discredit and deny the absolute sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. Just as higher critics are repudiating the Divine inspiration of the

Scriptures; evolutionists, the work of God in creation; so some pseudo Bible teachers are perverting His foreknowledge in order to set aside His unconditional election unto eternal life.

*Question # 2 - Do you agree with the tone the author takes towards those who differ from him? What kinds of attitudes are important in these kinds of discussions?*

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There are two things concerning the Foreknowledge of God about which many are in ignorance:

- A. The Meaning Of The Term
- B. Its Scriptural Scope

### **Most People Think That Foreknowledge For God Equals Foresight**

When the solemn and blessed subject of Divine foreordination is expounded, when God's eternal choice of certain ones to be conformed to the image of His Son is set forth, the Enemy sends along some man to argue that election is based upon the foreknowledge of God, and this "foreknowledge" is interpreted to mean that God foresaw certain ones would be more pliable than others, that they would respond more readily to the strivings of the Spirit, and that because God knew they *would* believe, He, accordingly, predestinated *them* unto salvation.

But such a statement is radically wrong. It repudiates the truth of total depravity, for it argues that there is something good in some men. It takes away the independency of God, for it makes His decrees *rest upon* what He discovers in the creature. It completely turns things upside down, for in saying God foresaw certain sinners would believe in Christ, and that because of this, He predestinated them unto salvation, is the very reverse of the truth. Scripture affirms that God, in His high sovereignty, singled out certain ones to be recipients of His distinguishing favors and therefore He determined to bestow upon them the gift of faith.

**Acts 13: 48** - When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed**.

False theology makes God's foreknowledge of our believing the *cause* of His election to salvation; whereas, God's election is the cause, and our believing in Christ is the *effect*.

*Question # 3 - How does Scripture's teaching on the sinfulness of man make the idea of God foreknowing our self-produced faith evidently false?*

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### **FOREKNOWLEDGE DEFINED BIBLICALLY:**

We must not jump at conclusions, nor must we turn to Webster's dictionary as the final court of appeal, for it is not a matter of the etymology of the term employed.

## How is the specific term used in Scripture:

What is needed is to find out how the word is *used* in Scripture. The Holy Spirit's usage of an expression always defines its meaning and scope. It is failure to apply this simple, rule which is responsible for so much confusion and error. So many people assume they already know the signification of a certain word used in Scripture, and then they are too dilatory to *test* their assumptions by means of a concordance. Let us amplify this point.

### Example: "Flesh"

Take the word "flesh." Its meaning appears to be so obvious that many would regard it as a waste of time to look up its various connections in Scripture. It is hastily assumed that the word is synonymous with the physical body, and so no inquiry is made. But, in fact, "flesh" in Scripture frequently includes far more than what is corporeal; all that is embraced by the term can only be ascertained by a diligent comparison of every occurrence of it and by a study of each separate context.

**Matthew 26: 24:** Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

**John 6: 56** - He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him

**Romans 8: 8** - So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

**1 Corinthians 1: 29** - That no flesh should glory in his presence.

*NOTE TO TEACHER: The bible uses the term "flesh" to variously describe the physical body, the fallen body, or the corrupting and damning effect and force of sin. In the case of the Lord's Table, the reference is obviously symbolic and defined in the immediate context.*

At first glance the word "flesh" means \_\_\_\_\_

Upon further consideration the word "flesh" also means \_\_\_\_\_

### Example: "World"

Take the word "world." The average reader of the Bible imagines this word is the equivalent for the human race, and consequently, many passages where the term is found are wrongly interpreted.

**John 7: 4** - For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.

**Acts 17: 6** - And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also

**Acts 17: 24** - God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

**Acts 19: 27** - So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

*NOTE TO TEACHER: The bible uses the term "world" to describe the globe, to everyone within sight (or within the sound of a voice), to EVERYONE, or to people across lines of division (like gender, race, age, marital status, civil status), to people of a particular geographic region but NOT ALWAYS every single person that is alive or ever breathed.*

At first glance "world" means \_\_\_\_\_

Upon further consideration "world" also means \_\_\_\_\_

Now what has just been said on "flesh," the "world," applies with equal force to the terms know and "foreknow." Instead of imagining that these words signify no more than a simple cognition, the different passages in which they occur require to be carefully weighed.

## SCRIPTURAL ROOTS OF FOREKNOWLEDGE

### "Know"

The word "foreknowledge" is not found in the Old Testament. But know occurs there frequently. When that term is used in connection with God, it often signifies *to regard with favour*, denoting *not mere* cognition but an *affection* for the object in view.

**Exodus 33: 17** - I know thee by name

**Deuteronomy 9: 24** - Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I *knew* you

**Jeremiah 1: 5** - Before I formed thee in the belly I *knew* thee

**Hosea 8: 4** - They have made princes and I *knew* it *not*

**Amos 3: 2** - You only have I known of all the families of the earth

In these passages knew signifies either *loved* or *appointed*. The word "know" is frequently used in the New Testament, in the same sense as in the Old Testament.

The word "know" does not always refer to the intellectual capacity of God.

*NOTE TO TEACHER: Ask the class in which of these texts would we be willing to say that God was ignorant and had no intelligence of the situation or the individual?*

**Matthew 7: 23** - Then will I profess unto them, I *never knew* you

**John 10: 14** - I am the good shepherd and *know* My sheep and am *known* of Mine

**1 Corinthians 8: 3** - If any man love God, the same is *known* of Him

**2 Timothy 2: 19** - The Lord *knoweth* them that are His

## “Foreknow” / “Foreknowledge”

Now the word "foreknowledge" as it is used in the New Testament is less ambiguous than in its simple form "to know."

If every passage in which it occurs is carefully studied, it will be discovered that it is a moot point whether it ever has reference to the mere perception of events which are yet to take place. The fact is that "foreknowledge" is *never* used in Scripture in connection with events or actions; instead, it always has reference to *persons*. It is persons God is said to "foreknow," not the actions of those persons.

*The Attributes Of God - A.W. Pink*

In proof of this we shall now quote each passage where this expression is found.

**Acts 2: 23** – this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

If careful attention is paid to the wording of this verse it will be seen that the apostle was not there speaking of God's foreknowledge of the *act* of the crucifixion, but of the *Person* crucified: "Him (Christ) being delivered by," etc.

**Romans 8: 29** – For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

The object of foreknowledge in this passage is: \_\_\_\_\_

Weigh well the pronoun that is used here. It is not *what* He did foreknow, but *whom* He did. It is not the surrendering of their wills nor the believing of their hearts but the *persons* themselves, which is here in view.

**Romans 11: 2** – God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?

The object of foreknowledge in this passage is: \_\_\_\_\_

Once more the plain reference is to persons, and to persons only.

**1 Peter 1: 1** – Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. 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.

The object of foreknowledge in this passage is: \_\_\_\_\_

*Who* are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father? The previous verse tells us: the reference is to the "strangers scattered" i.e. the Diaspora, the Dispersion, the believing Jews. Thus, here too the reference is to persons, and not to their foreseen acts.

Now in view of these passages (and there are no more) *what scriptural ground* is there for anyone saying God "foreknew" the acts of certain ones, viz., their "repenting and believing," and that because of those acts He elected them unto salvation? The answer is, None whatever. Scripture *never* speaks of repentance and faith as being foreseen or foreknown by God. Truly, He *did* know from all eternity that certain ones *would* repent and believe, yet this is not what Scripture refers to as the *object* of God's "foreknowledge." The word uniformly refers to God's foreknowing *persons*; then let us "hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13).

Quite commonly people will agree that God predestines some to be saved, but they will say that he does this by looking into the future and seeing who will believe in Christ and who will not. If he sees that a person is going to come to saving faith, then he will predestine that person to be saved. In this way, it is thought, the ultimate reason why some are saved and some are not lies within the people themselves, not within God. All that God does in his predestining work is to give confirmation to the decision he knows people will make on their own. The verse commonly used to support this view is Romans 8:29: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."

*"Misunderstandings of the Doctrine of Election"*  
*Systematic Theology - Wayne Grudem*

<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/misunderstandings.html>

**Question # 4** - Summarize what Scripture means when it speaks of God foreknowing. What are the key elements in the passages cited?

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### **What is behind God's "foreknowledge"?**

Another thing to which we desire to call particular attention is that the first two passages quoted above show plainly and teach implicitly that God's "foreknowledge" *is not causative*, that instead, something else lies behind, precedes it, and that something is His own *sovereign decree*.

**Acts 2: 23** - this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

The basis of foreknowledge in this passage is: \_\_\_\_\_

Christ was "delivered by the

(1) determinate counsel (*predetermined plan*)

and

(2) foreknowledge of God." (Acts 2:23).

His "counsel" or decree was the ground of His foreknowledge

Romans 8:29

The basis of foreknowledge in this passage is: \_\_\_\_\_

That verse opens with the word "for," which tells us to look back to what immediately precedes. What, then, does the previous verse say? This, "all things work together for good to them. . . who are the called according to His purpose." Thus God's foreknowledge is *based upon* His purpose or decree (see Ps. 2:7).

God foreknows what *will be* because He has decreed what *shall be*.

The Attributes Of God – A.W. Pink

It is therefore a reversing of the order of Scripture, a putting of the cart before the horse, to affirm that God elects because He foreknows people. The truth is, He "foreknows" because He has *elected*. This removes the ground or cause of election from outside the creature, and places it in God's own sovereign will.

As to *why* He chose the ones He did, we do not know, and can only say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in *Thy* sight." The plain truth of Romans 8:29 is that God, before the foundation of the world, singled out certain sinners and appointed them unto salvation (2 Thess. 2:13). This is clear from the concluding words of the verse: "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son," etc. God did not predestinate those whom He foreknew *were* "conformed," but, on the contrary, those whom He "foreknew" (i.e., loved and elected) He predestinated *to be* conformed. Their conformity to Christ is not the cause, but the effect of God's foreknowledge and predestination.

God did not elect any sinner because He foresaw that he would believe, for the simple but sufficient reason that *no* sinner ever does believe until God gives him faith; just as no man sees until God gives him sight. Sight is God's gift, seeing is the consequence of my using His gift. So faith is God's gift (Eph. 1:8,9), believing is the consequence of my using His gift. If it were true that God had elected certain ones to be saved *because* in due time they would believe, then that would make believing a *meritorious* act, and in that event the saved sinner *would* have ground for "boasting," which Scripture emphatically denies: Ephesians 2:9.

Surely God's Word is plain enough in teaching that believing is not a meritorious act. It affirms that Christians are a people "who have believed *through grace*" (Acts 18:27). If then, they have believed "through grace," there is absolutely nothing meritorious about "believing," and if nothing meritorious, it could not be the ground or cause which moved God to choose them. No; God's choice proceeds not from anything in us, or anything from us, but solely from His own sovereign pleasure. Once more, in Romans 11:5, we read of "a remnant according to the election of grace." There it is, plain enough; election itself is *of grace*, and grace is *unmerited* favour something for which we had *no claim* upon God whatsoever.

*Question # 5 - How does the rich personal nature of the foreknowledge of God serve to magnify the grace of God in your mind?*

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It thus appears that it is highly important for us to have clear and scriptural views of the "foreknowledge" of God. Erroneous conceptions about it lead inevitably to thoughts most dishonoring to Him. The popular idea of Divine foreknowledge is altogether inadequate. God not only knew the end from the beginning, but He planned, fixed, predestinated everything from the beginning. And, as cause stands to effect, so God's purpose is the ground of His prescience. If then the reader be a real Christian, he is so because God chose him in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and chose not because He foresaw you *would* believe, but chose simply because it pleased Him to choose: chose you notwithstanding your natural unbelief. This being so, all the glory and praise belongs alone to Him. You have no ground for taking *any* credit to yourself. You have "believed *through grace*" (Acts 18:27), and that, because your very election was "of grace" (Rom. 11:5).

*Question # 6 - How does the saving work of Christ relate to God foreknowing His people?*

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### **Predestination Based on Foreknowledge Still Does Not Give People Free Choice**

The idea that God's predestination of some to believe is based on foreknowledge of their faith encounters still another problems: upon reflection, this system turns out to give no real freedom to man either. For if God can look into the future and see that person A will come to faith in Christ, and that person B will not come to faith in Christ, then those facts are already fixed, they are already determined. If we assume that God's knowledge of the future is true (which it must be), then it is absolutely certain that person A will believe and person B will not. There is no way that their lives could turn out any differently than this. Therefore it is fair to say that their destinies are still determined, for they could not be otherwise. But by what are these destinies determined? If they are determined by God himself, then we no longer have election based ultimately on foreknowledge of faith, but rather on God's



sovereign will. But if these destinies are not determined by God, then who or what determines them? Certainly no Christian would say that there is some powerful being other than God controlling people's destinies. Therefore it seems that the only other possible solution is to say they are determined by some impersonal force, some kind of fate, operative in the universe, making things turn out as they do. But what kind of benefit is this? We have then sacrificed election in love by a personal God for a kind of determinism by an impersonal force and God is no longer to be given the ultimate credit for our salvation.

*"Misunderstandings of the Doctrine of Election"*  
*Systematic Theology - Wayne Grudem*

*Question # 7* - What application do you see in this chapter for what you believe, how you think about yourself, and how you relate to God?

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## PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK

Read Chapter 5– The Supremacy Of God

1. In what ways do we tend to erroneously think that God is like us (Psalm 50:21)? Why do you think we tend towards this?

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2. Take a moment to write down in your own words what God's supremacy means. How supreme is He? What kinds of words do you find useful in this description?

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3. What is one example from Scripture of an individual who had an understanding of the supremacy of God? How did this understanding affect that person?

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4. How does God's supremacy help you think rightly about earthly dangers, world powers, and the events that often seem uncontrollable?

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5. Having read this chapter, take a moment to reflect on the incarnation and God's compassion towards us in Christ. What is your response to these truths?

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6. How does beholding God and considering the supreme joy of knowing Him encourage your heart in telling others the good news of Christ?

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# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 6 – 9 January 2011

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## THE SUPREMACY OF GOD

In one of his letters to Erasmus, Luther said, "Your thoughts of God are too human." Probably that renowned scholar resented such a rebuke, the more so, since it proceeded from a miner's son; nevertheless, it was thoroughly deserved. We too, though having no standing among the religious leaders of this degenerate age, prefer the same charge against the majority of the preachers of our day, and against those who, instead of searching the Scriptures for themselves, lazily accept the teaching of others.

*The Attributes Of God – A.W. Pink*

The most dishonoring and degrading conceptions of the rule and reign of the Almighty are now held almost everywhere. To countless thousands, even among those professing to be Christians, the God of the Scriptures is quite unknown.

Of old, God complained to an apostate Israel,

**Psalm 50: 21** - You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes.

- God is moved by sentiment, rather than actuated by principle
- His omnipotency is such an idle fiction that Satan is thwarting His designs on every side
- whatever power He possesses must be restricted, lest He invade the citadel of man's "free will" and reduce him to a "machine."
- They lower the all efficacious Atonement, which has actually redeemed everyone for whom it was made, to a mere "remedy," which sin-sick souls may use if they feel disposed
- they enervate the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an "offer" of the Gospel which sinners may accept or reject as they please.

**Question # 1** - In what ways do we tend to erroneously think that God is like us Why do you think we tend towards this?

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Some notions of God which are sub-biblical:

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*My god would never . . . God is not sovereign over tornados . . . God wants me happy .*

## I. Idolatry – A Direct Assault On God’s Supremacy

Idolatry is the most discussed problem in the Bible and one of the most powerful spiritual and intellectual concepts in the believer’s arsenal. Yet for Christians today it is one of the least meaningful notions and is surrounded with ironies. Perhaps this is why many evangelicals are ignorant of the idols in their lives...Contemporary evangelicals are little better at recognizing and resisting idols than modern secular people are...There can be no believing communities without an unswerving eye to the detection and destruction of idols.

*No God But God - Os Guinness & John Seel*

The human heart is a factory of idols. Everyone of us is, from his mother’s womb, expert in inventing idols.

*The Institutes Of The Christian Religion - John Calvin*

Four Kinds Of Unacceptable Worship – Scripture suggests at least four categories of deviant worship all of which are appropriately described as idolatry.

### A. The Worship Of False Gods

One is the worship of false gods. There is no other God but the God of the Bible, and He is a jealous God who will not tolerate the worship of another.

**Exodus 34: 14** - You shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

**Isaiah 48: 11** - My glory will I not give to another.

Yet the world worships false gods. God, in Romans 1, indicts all of mankind:

*QUESTION – What does this passage contribute to the idea of the importance of right worship?*

- a. right worship is based on truth and objective reality
- b. right worship reveals a heart that is not foolish or darkened
- c. False worship results in being “given over to impurity” and “dishonor” and “degrading passions” and “indecent” and “receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error” and being “worthy of death” and giving “heartly approval to those who practice” such things.

False gods may be either material objects or mythical, supernatural beings. Material gods may be worshiped even without the conscious thought that they are deities.

**Job 31: 24 – 28** - If I have put my confidence in gold, and called fine gold my trust,  
If I have gloated because my wealth was great, and because my hand had secured so much; if  
I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon going in splendor,

And my heart became secretly enticed, and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth,  
That too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment, for I would have denied God above.

That describes a man who refuses the inclination to worship his material wealth. If you worship what you possess, if you center your life on yourself, your possessions, or even your needs, you have denied God.

Habakkuk 1:16 describes the false worship of the Chaldeans:

**Habakkuk 1:16** - The Chaldeans bring all of them [the righteous] up with a hook, drag them away with their net, and gather them together in their fishing net. Therefore, they rejoice and are glad. Therefore, they offer a sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their fishing net.

Their “net” was their military might, and the god they worshiped was armed power—a false god.

Some formulate supernatural gods, supposed deities. That, too, is unacceptable.

1 Corinthians 10: 20 - things sacrificed to idols are sacrificed unto **demons**.

Therefore, if men worship false beings, they are actually worshiping the demons that impersonate those false gods.

Acts 17:29 contains a marvelous observation by Paul.

**Acts 17: 29** - Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

## **B. The Worship Of The True God In A Wrong Form**

**Exodus 32: 7 – 9** - Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed unto it, and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’

When God revealed Himself to the Israelites, He was not represented in any visible form. There was no tangible representation of God—and that is true of God throughout the Scriptures. Why? Because God does not wish to be reduced to any image.

If you think of God as an old man with a beard sitting in a chair—that’s unacceptable. Idolatry does not begin with a sculptor’s hammer, it begins with the mind. When we think of God, what should we visualize? Absolutely nothing. No visual conception of God could properly represent His eternal glory. That may be why God is described as light. It is not possible to make a statue of light.

### C. The Worship Of The True God In A Self-Styled Manner

A third kind of deviant worship is the worship of the true God in a self-styled manner. As we have seen, Nadab and Abihu, Saul, and Uzzah were all guilty of worshiping God in their own way without regard to His revelation. That is false worship just as surely as worshiping a stone idol is false worship, and God does not accept it.

**Leviticus 10** - Nadab and Abihu

King Saul was guilty of a similar sin.

**I Samuel 13: 8 – 14**

Worshipping by his rules instead of God's. Saul saw worship as a means to accomplish his ends. He also placed little concern on what God wanted worship to be like.

**2 Samuel 6** - Uzzah the Kohathite.

The Pharisees tried to worship the true God with a self-styled system, and Jesus told them, "You yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition" (Matthew 15:3). Their worship was an abomination.

### D. The Worship Of The True God In The Right Way, With A Wrong Attitude

In Malachi 1 God denounces the people of Israel for the inadequacy of their worship. "You are presenting defiled food upon My altar," He says (v. 7). They were treating the matter of worship with disdain, with flippancy. By offering blind, lame, and sick animals (v. 8) instead of bringing the best they had, they were demonstrating contempt for the seriousness of worship

**Amos 5: 21** - I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

**Hosea 6: 4 – 6** - What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud, and like the dew which goes away early. Therefore I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth; and the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth. For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

## II. Protecting Our Heart From Idolatry – A Bibliocentric Approach

The supremacy of the true and living God might well be argued from the infinite distance which separates the mightiest creatures from the almighty Creator. He is the Potter, they are but the clay in His hands to be molded into vessels of honor, or to be dashed into pieces as He pleases.

Were all the denizens of heaven and all the inhabitants of the earth to combine in revolt against Him, it would occasion Him no uneasiness, and would have less effect upon His eternal and unassailable Throne than has the spray of Mediterranean's waves upon the towering rocks of Gibraltar. So puerile and powerless is the creature to affect the Most High, Scripture itself tells us that when the Gentile heads unite with apostate Israel to defy Jehovah and His Christ, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall *laugh*" (Ps. 2:4).

*Question # 2* - Take a moment to write down in your own words what God's supremacy means. How supreme is He? What kinds of words do you find useful in this description?

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## A. The Absolute And Universal Supremacy Of God *In Scripture*

**1 Chronicles 29: 11 - 12** - Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; 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, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone.

Note that God reignest now, not "will do so in the Millennium.

**2 Chronicles 20: 6** - O LORD, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You

Before Him presidents and popes, kings and emperors, are less than grasshoppers.

**Job 23: 13** - But He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, *even that* He doeth

Ah, my reader, the God of Scripture is no make-believe monarch, no mere imaginary sovereign, but King of kings, and Lord of lords. "I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought of Thine can be hindered" (Job 42:3, margin), or, as another translator, "no purpose of Thine can be frustrated." All that He has designed He does. All that He has decreed, He performs.

**Psalms 115: 3** - But our God is in the heavens: He hath done *whatsoever* He hath pleased"

Why has He? Because

**Prov 21: 30** - There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD.

God's supremacy over the works of His hands is vividly depicted in Scripture. Inanimate matter, irrational creatures, all perform their Maker's bidding. At His pleasure the Red Sea divided and its waters stood up as walls (Ex. 14); and the earth opened her mouth, and guilty rebels went down alive into the pit (Num. 14). When He so ordered, the sun stood still (Josh. 10); and on another occasion went *backward* ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz (Isa. 38:8). To exemplify His supremacy, He made ravens carry food to Elijah (1 Kings 17), iron to swim on top of the waters (2 Kings 6:5), lions to be tame when Daniel was cast into their den, fire to burn not when the three Hebrews were

flung into its flames. Thus "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Psa. 135:6).

*Question # 3* - What is one example from Scripture of an individual who had an understanding of the supremacy of God? How did this understanding affect that person?

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*Nebuchadnezzar, Job, Pharoh, Jonah, Israel with Elisha & Prophets of Baal 1 Kings 18*

God's supremacy is also demonstrated in His perfect rule over the *wills* of men. Let the reader ponder carefully Ex. 34:24.

**Exodus 34: 24** - For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD your God.

Three times in the year all the males of Israel were required to leave their homes and go up to Jerusalem. They lived in the midst of hostile people, who hated them for having appropriated their lands. What, then, was to hinder the Canaanites from seizing their opportunity, and, during the absence of the men, slaying the women and children and taking possession of their farms? If the hand of the Almighty was not upon the wills even of wicked men, how could He make this promise beforehand, that none *should* so much as "desire" their lands?

**Proverbs 21: 1** - The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will

But, it may be objected, do we not read again and again in Scripture how that men defied God, resisted His will, broke His commandments, disregarded His warnings, and turned a deaf ear to all His exhortations? Certainly we do. And does this nullify all that we have said above? If it does, then the Bible plainly contradicts itself. But that cannot be. What the objector refers to is simply the wickedness of man against the *external* word of God, whereas what we have mentioned above is what God has *purposed in Himself*. The rule of conduct He has given us to walk by, is perfectly fulfilled by none of us; His own eternal "counsels" are accomplished to their minutest details.

The absolute and universal supremacy of God is affirmed with equal plainness and positiveness in the New Testament. There we are told

**Ephesians 1: 22** - God worketh *all* things after the counsel of His own will

The Greek for "worketh" means to work effectually. For this reason we read, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). Men may boast that they are free agents, with a will of their own, and are at liberty to do as they please, but Scripture says to those who boast "we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell...Ye ought to say, *If the Lord will*" (Jas. 4:13,15)!

Here then is a sure resting-place for the heart. Our lives are neither the product of blind fate nor the result of capricious chance, but every detail of them was ordained from all eternity. and is now ordered by the living and reigning God. Not a hair of our heads can be touched without His permission. "A man's heart deviseth his way: *but the Lord directeth his steps*" (Prov. 16:9). What



assurance, what strength, what comfort should this give the real Christian! "My times are in *Thy* hand" (Ps. 31:15). Then let me "*Rest in the Lord*, and wait patiently for Him" (Ps. 37:7).

*Question # 4* - How does God's supremacy help you think rightly about earthly dangers, world powers, and the events that often seem uncontrollable?

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## B. The Supreme Omnipotence Of God *Refutes Idolatry*

We cannot have a right conception of God unless we think of Him as all-powerful, as well as all-wise. He who cannot do what he will and perform all his pleasure cannot be God. As God hath a will to resolve what He deems good, so has He power to execute His will.

*The Attributes Of God – A.W. Pink*

**Psalm 62: 11** - God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God

"God hath spoken once": nothing more is necessary! Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His word abideth forever. God hath spoken once: how befitting His Divine majesty! We poor mortals may speak often and yet fail to be heard. He speaks but once and the thunder of His power is heard on a thousand hills.

**Psalm 18: 13 – 15** - The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice; hailstones and coals of fire. Yea, He sent out His arrows, and scattered them; and He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen and the foundations of the world were discovered at Thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils

"God hath spoken once": behold His unchanging authority. "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord?" (Ps. 89:6). "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as *nothing*: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What dost Thou?" (Dan. 4:35). This was openly displayed when God became incarnate and tabernacled among men. To the leper He said, "I Will, be thou clean, and *immediately* his leprosy was cleansed" (Matt. 8:3). To one who had lain in the grave four days He cried, "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead came forth. The stormy wind and the angry wave were hushed at a single word from Him. A legion of demons could not resist His authoritative command.

"Power *belongeth* unto God," and to Him alone. Not a creature in the entire universe has an atom of power save what God delegates. But God's power is not acquired, nor does it depend upon any recognition by any other authority. It belongs to Him inherently.

*The Attributes Of God – A.W. Pink*

God's power is like Himself, self-existent, self-sustained. The mightiest of men cannot add so much as a shadow of increased power to the Omnipotent One. He sits on no buttressed throne and leans on no assisting arm. His court is not maintained by His courtiers, nor does it

borrow its splendor from His creatures. He is Himself the great central source and Originator of all power

C. H. Spurgeon

Not only does all creation bear witness to the great power of God, but also to His entire independency of all created things. Listen to His own challenge: "Where wast *thou* when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened or who laid the cornerstone thereof?" (Job 38:4-6). How completely is the pride of man laid in the dust!

Power is also used as a name of God, the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power (Mark 14:62), that is, at the right hand of God. God and power are so inseparable that they are reciprocated. As His essence is immense, not to be confined in place; as it is eternal, not to be measured in time; so it is almighty, not to be limited in regard of action (S. Charnock).

"Lo, these are parts of His ways:" but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand? (Job 26:14). Who is able to count all the monuments of His power? Even that which is displayed of His might in the visible creation is utterly beyond our powers of comprehension, still less are we able to conceive of omnipotence itself. There is infinitely more power lodged in the nature of God than is expressed in all His works.

"Parts of His ways" we behold in creation, providence, redemption, but only a "little part" of *His* might is seen in them. Remarkably is this brought out in Habakkuk 3:4: "and *there* was the hiding of His power." It is scarcely possible to imagine anything more grandiloquent than the imagery of this whole chapter, yet nothing in it surpasses the nobility of this statement. The prophet (in vision) beheld the mighty God scattering the hills and overturning the mountains, which one would think afforded an amazing demonstration of His power. Nay, says our verse, *that* is rather the "hiding" than the displaying of *His* power. What is meant? This: so inconceivable, so immense, so uncontrollable is the power of Deity, that the fearful convulsions which He works in nature conceal more than they reveal of His infinite might!

It is very beautiful to link together the following passages: "He walketh upon the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8), which expresses God's uncontrollable power. "He walketh in the circuit of Heaven" (Job 22:14), which tells of the immensity of His presence. "He walketh upon the wings of the wind" (Ps. 104:3), which signifies the amazing swiftness of His operations. This last expression is very remarkable. It is not that "He flieth," or "runneth," but that He "walketh" and that, on the very "wings of the wind"—on the most impetuous of the elements, tossed into utmost rage, and sweeping along with almost inconceivable rapidity, yet they are *under* His feet, beneath His perfect control!

## 1. We See God's Supremacy And Power In Creation

**Psalm 89: 11 – 12** - The heavens are Thine, the earth also is Thine, as for the world and the fulness thereof, Thou hast founded them. The north and the south Thou hast created them

Before man can work he must have both tools and materials, but God began with nothing, and by His word alone out of nothing made all things. The intellect cannot grasp it. God "spake and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:9). Primeval matter heard His voice. "God said, Let there be. . .and it was so" (Gen. 1). Well may we exclaim, "Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is Thy hand, high is Thy right hand" (Ps. 89:13).

Who, that looks upward to the midnight sky; and, with an eye of reason, beholds its rolling wonders; who can forbear inquiring, Of *what* were their mighty orbs *formed*? Amazing to relate, they were produced without materials. They sprung from emptiness itself. The stately fabric of universal nature emerged out of *nothing*. What instruments were used by the Supreme Architect to fashion the parts with such exquisite niceness, and give so beautiful a polish to the whole? How was it all connected into one finely-proportioned and nobly finished structure? *A bare fiat* accomplished all. *Let them be*, said God. He added no more; and at once the marvelous edifice arose, adorned with every beauty, displaying innumerable perfections, and declaring amidst enraptured seraphs its great Creator's praise. "By the *word* of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the *breath* of His mouth," Psa. 150:1 (James Hervey, 1789).

## **2. We See God's Supremacy And Power In Preservation**

No creature has power to preserve itself. "Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow up without water?" (Job 8:11). Both man and beast would perish if there were not herbs for food, and herbs would wither and die if the earth were not refreshed with fruitful showers. Therefore is God called the Preserver of "man and beast" (Ps. 36:6). "He upholdeth all things by the word of His power" (Heb 1:3). What a marvel of Divine power is the prenatal life of every human being! That an infant can live at all, and for so many months, in such cramped and filthy quarters, and that without breathing, is unaccountable without the power of God. Truly He "holdeth our soul in life" (Ps. 66:9).

The preservation of the earth from the violence of the sea is another plain instance of God's might. How is that raging element kept pent within those limits wherein He first lodged it, continuing its channel, without overflowing the earth and dashing in pieces the lower part of the creation? The natural situation of the water is to be above the earth, because it is lighter, and to be immediately under the air, because it is heavier. Who restrains the natural quality of it? certainly man does not, and cannot. It is the fiat of its Creator which alone bridles it: And said, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" (Job 38:11). What a standing monument of the power of God is the preservation of the world!

## **3. We See God's Supremacy And Power In Government**

Take His restraining the malice of Satan. "The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). He is filled with hatred against God, and with fiendish enmity against men, particularly the saints. He that envied Adam in paradise, envies us the pleasure of enjoying any of God's blessings. Could he have his will, he would treat all the same way he treated Job: he would send fire from heaven on the fruits of the earth, destroying the cattle, cause a wind to overthrow our houses, and cover our bodies with boils. But, little as men may realize it, God bridles him to a large extent, prevents him from carrying out his evil designs, and confines him within *His* ordinations.

So too God restrains the natural corruption of men. He suffers sufficient outbursts of sin to show what fearful havoc has been wrought by man's apostasy from his Maker, but who can conceive the frightful lengths to which men would go were God to remove His curbing hand? "Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness their feet are swift to shed blood" (Rom. 3). This is the nature of every descendant of Adam. Then what unbridled licentiousness and headstrong

folly would triumph in the world, if the power of God did not interpose to lock down the floodgates of it! See Psalm 93:3,4.

#### **4. We See God's Supremacy And Power In Judgment**

When He smites, none can resist Him: see Ezekiel 22:14. How terribly this was exemplified at the Flood! God opened the windows of heaven and broke up the great fountains of the deep, and (excepting those in the ark) the entire human race, helpless before the storm of His wrath, was swept away. A shower of fire and brimstone from heaven, and the cities of the plain were exterminated. Pharaoh and all his hosts were impotent when God blew upon them at the Red Sea. What a terrific word is that in Romans 9:22: "What if God, willing to show wrath, and to make His *power* known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." God is going to display His mighty power upon the reprobate not merely by incarcerating them in Gehenna, but by supernaturally preserving their bodies as well as souls amid the eternal burnings of the Lake of Fire.

Well may all *tremble* before such a God! To treat with impunity One who can crush us more easily than we can a moth, is a suicidal policy. To openly defy Him who is clothed with omnipotence, who can rend us in pieces or cast into Hell any moment He pleases, is the very height of insanity. To put it on its lowest ground, it is but the part of wisdom to heed His command, "Kiss the Son. lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little" (Ps. 2:12).

Well may the enlightened soul *adore* such a God! The wondrous and infinite perfections of such a Being call for fervent worship. If men of might and renown claim the admiration of the world, how much more should the power of the Almighty fill us with wonderment and homage. "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Ex. 15:11).

Well may the saint trust such a God! He is worthy of implicit confidence. Nothing is too hard for Him. 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.

"The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1). "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:20,21).

#### **5. We See God's Supremacy And Power As Without Limit**

#### **6. We See God's Supremacy And Power Without Self Contradiction**

#### **7. We See God's Supremacy And Power In Judgment**

*Question # 5* - Having read this chapter, take a moment to reflect on the incarnation and God's compassion towards us in Christ. What is your response to these truths?

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### III. The Supremacy Of God Is Efectual

1. Resulting In Praise
2. Resulting In Fear
3. Resulting In Comfort

*Question # 6* - How does beholding God and considering the supreme joy of knowing Him encourage your heart in telling others the good news of Christ?

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### PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK

Read Chapters 6 & 7 – The Sovereignty Of God and The Immutability Of God

*Question # 1* - Consider Pink's statement, "divine sovereignty means that God is God in fact, as well as in name". In what sense is God's sovereignty attached to the very idea of Him being God?

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*Question # 2* - How sovereign is God? Are there limits to His sovereignty? What evidence do we find biblically?

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*Question # 3* - Why do you think men tend to resist God's sovereignty? What about it is so disturbing to us?

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*Question # 4* - What makes God's sovereignty a sweet and joyous truth for us as God's people?

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*Question # 5* - Do you find divine sovereignty and human responsibility difficult to reconcile? Do you find the author's description and argument in this chapter helpful?

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*Question # 6* - How does God's sovereignty affect the way you view and react to the minor events that make up every day life?

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*Question # 7* - How would your thoughts about God and relation to God be affected if the possibility existed that some aspect of Him might change?

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*Question # 8* - How would you explain the biblical reality that God interacts with men in time and space seemingly reacting to various circumstances while remaining immutable in His counsel?

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*Question # 9* - In what ways do you change? How does reflecting on this increase your amazement at the immutability of God?

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*Question # 10* - What makes the immutability of God comforting to you? How might this affect the way you view and deal with the myriad of things in your life that do change?

# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 7 – 16 January 2011

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## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

The sovereignty of God may be defined as the exercise of His supremacy.

*The Attributes Of God - A. W. Pink*

Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. So His own Word expressly declares:

**Isaiah 46: 10** - My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure

**Daniel 4: 35** - He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand

Divine sovereignty means that God is God in fact, as well as in name, that He is on the Throne of the universe, directing all things, working all things "after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

**Question # 1** - Consider Pink's statement, "divine sovereignty means that God is God in fact, as well as in name". In what sense is God's sovereignty attached to the very idea of Him being God?

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Rightly did Mr. Spurgeon say in his sermon on Matthew 20:15:

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 worldings, 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 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 we are hissed and execrated, and 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.

"Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Ps. 135:6). Yes, dear reader, such is the imperial Potentate revealed in Holy Writ. Unrivalled in majesty, unlimited in power, unaffected by anything outside Himself. But we are living in a day when even the most "orthodox" seem afraid to admit the proper Godhood of God. They say that to press excludes human responsibility; whereas human responsibility is based upon Divine sovereignty, and is the product of it.

"But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever *He* hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). He *sovereignly* chose to place each of His creatures on that particular footing which seemed good in His sight. He created angels: some He placed on a conditional footing, others He gave an immutable standing before Him (1 Tim. 5:21), making Christ their head (Col. 2:10).

Let it not be overlooked that the angels which sinned (2 Pet. 2:5), were as much His creatures as the angels that sinned not. Yet God foresaw they *would* fall, nevertheless He placed them on a mutable creature, conditional footing, and suffered them to fall, though He was not the Author of their sin.

*Sermon On Matthew 20: 15 – C. H. Spurgeon*

## A. The Sovereignty Of God Described

### 1. God Is Sovereign Over Nature And Weather

**Jeremiah 10: 12 - 13** - It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens. When He utters His voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain, and brings out the wind from His storehouses

**Amos 4: 7** - And furthermore [declares the Lord], I withheld the rain from you while there were still three months until harvest. Then I would send rain on one city and on another city I would not send rain; one part would be rained on, while the part not rained on would dry up

Psalms 104; 105: 16; 135: 7; 147: 7 - 20; 148; Job 9: 5 - 10; 26: 5 - 14; 37: 1 - 24; 38: 8 - 38; Jeremiah 10: 12 - 13; Mark 4: 39 & 41

### 2. God Is Sovereign Over Kings And Nations

**Daniel 2: 20** - Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him.

21 - It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding.

22 - It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him.

23 - To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom and power; even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, for You have made known to us the king's matter."



Ultimately it was neither the sin and weakness of Jehoiakim nor the brilliance and strength of Nebuchadnezzar, not even the impotence or inactivity of God, but the sovereign good pleasure of Yahweh that determined the historical outcome

The Israelites are not mere pawns on a political and geographical chessboard. To be in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar is not to be out of the control of God.

John Goldingay

Daniel 1: 2; Daniel 2: 37 - 38; 4: 25, 30, 32; 5: 18, 20, 21; Isaiah 10: 5 - 13; 40: 23 - 24; Jeremiah 25: 1 - 12; Isaiah 10: 5 - 14

### 3. God Is Sovereign Over The Casting Of The Lot

**Proverbs 16: 33** - The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD

The casting of lots was often used in the OT to determine God's will. Although the decision is reached by a seemingly arbitrary process, God is in absolute control. As someone said, "Man throws the dice, but God makes the spots turn up!"

Leviticus 16: 7 - 10, 21, 22; Joshua 7: 14 (cf. 1 Samuel 14: 42); 14: 2; 18: 6; 1 Chronicles 6: 54 ff.; 25: 7, 8; 26: 13 ff; Nehemiah 10: 34 ff; Matthew 27: 35; Acts 1: 26

### 4. God Is Sovereign Over People And Their Hearts

**Proverbs 16: 1** - The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

**Proverbs 16: 9** - The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.

Over all our actions and words - For all its emphasis on common sense, Proverbs exalts faith above wisdom; and for all its emphasis on prudence, man's ways are determined by divine providence. A man may plan his road to the last detail, but he cannot implement his planning unless it coincides with Yahweh's plan for him. He is deluded if he supposes that he has unfettered control and can impose his will on every situation without limitation in order to make his plan a reality, for it is Yahweh who orders his steps" (McKane, 495-96).

**Proverbs 21: 1** - The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.

In much the same way that an irrigator might cut a watercourse in any direction he desires, so God sways the heart of a king, even an unbelieving one.

Genesis 20: 6; Proverbs 21: 1; 16: 9; Exodus 3: 21 - 22; 12: 35 - 36; 34: 23 - 24; Deuteronomy 2: 30; Joshua 11: 20; Judges 7: 2 - 3, 22; 1 Sam. 14: 6, 15, 20; 2 Samuel 17: 14; 1 Kings 12: 15; 20: 28 - 29; 2 Chronicles 13: 14 - 16; Ezra 1: 1, 5; 6: 22; 7: 27; Isaiah 45: 4 - 5; Acts 4: 27 - 28; 2 Corinthians 8: 16 - 17; Revelations 17: 17; Exodus 4: 21; 7: 3; 9: 16; 10: 1 - 2; 14: 4 - 5; Isaiah 10: 5 - 19; 45: 1 - 13; Ezra 1: 1, 5 (Cyrus, king of Persia); Jeremiah 25: 3 - 14; Habbakuk 1: 5 - 11; Acts 4: 25 - 28; Revelation 17: 16 - 17

### 5. God Is Sovereign Over The Closing And Opening Of The Womb

**Genesis 29: 31** - Now the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren

Genesis 16: 2; 1 Samuel 1: 5; Judges 13: 3

## 6. God Is Sovereign Over The Battle And Its Outcome

**Proverbs 21: 30 - 31** – There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD. The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD.

Psalm 20: 7; 33: 13 - 17; Isaiah 31: 1 - 3

## 7. God Is Sovereign Over Everything (Including Evil) In General

**Genesis 50: 20** - As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Psalm 105: 17; Exodus 4: 11 (disease and disability); Job 2: 10 (cf. James 5: 11); 42: 2; Psalm 115: 3; Proverbs 16: 33; 21: 31; Isaiah 45: 7 (virtually all of Isaiah 42 - 48); Lamentations 3: 37 - 38; Daniel 4: 32, 35; Amos 3: 6; Matthew 10: 29 - 31; Acts 4: 27 - 28; Ephesians 1: 11; 2 Corinthians 12: 7

## 8. God Is Sovereign Over Life And Death

**Deuteronomy 32: 39** - See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me. It is I who put to death and give life; I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.

2 Samuel 12: 15; James 4: 14 - 15; 1 Samuel 2: 6 - 7

## 9. God Is Sovereign Over Our Souls

**Proverbs 18: 10** - The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe.

Proverbs 24: 12c; 18: 10; 30: 5b

I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes - that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit, as well as the sun in the heavens - that the chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as the stars in their courses. The creeping of an aphid over the rosebud is as much fixed as the march of the devastating pestilence - the fall of . . . leaves from a poplar is as fully ordained as the tumbling of an avalanche.

*C. H. Spurgeon*

When Spurgeon was challenged that this is nothing but fatalism and stoicism, he replied,

What is fate? Fate is this - *Whatever is, must be*. But there is a difference between that and Providence. Providence says, *Whatever God ordains, must be*; but the wisdom of God never ordains anything without a purpose. Everything in this world is working for some great end. Fate does not say that. . . . There is all the difference between fate and Providence that there is between a man with good eyes and a blind man.

*C. H. Spurgeon*

## 10. God Is Sovereign Over The Destiny Of The Wicked

**Proverbs 16: 4** - The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.

There are no loose ends in God's providential rule of the world: even the wicked are under his oversight. God has appointed all things and all people to their proper end that he might receive all the glory.

## 11. God Is Sovereign Over Destructive Animals

When the Assyrians populated Samaria with foreigners

**2 Kings 17: 25** - Therefore the LORD sent lions among them which killed some of them

**Daniel 6: 22** - My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths

Other Scriptures speak of God commanding birds and bears and donkeys and large fish to do his bidding. Which means that all calamities that are owing to animal life are ultimately in the control of God. He can see a pit bull break loose from his chain and attack a child; and he could, with one word, command that its mouth be shut.

Similarly he controls the invisible animal and plant life that wreaks havoc in the world: bacteria and viruses and parasites and thousands of microscopic beings that destroy health and life. If God can shut the mouth of a ravenous lion, then he can shut the mouth of a malaria-carrying mosquito and nullify every other animal that kills.

*Question # 2* - How sovereign is God? Are there limits to His sovereignty? What evidence do we find biblically?

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*Question # 3* - Why do you think men tend to resist God's sovereignty? What about it is so disturbing to us?

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*Question # 4* - What makes God's sovereignty a sweet and joyous truth for us as God's people?

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## B. The Sovereignty Of God And Man's Responsibility

### 1. God Sovereignly Placed Adam In The Garden Of Eden Upon A Conditional Footing

Had He so pleased, He could have placed him upon an *unconditional* footing; He could have placed him on a footing as firm as that occupied by the unfallen angels, He could have placed him upon a footing as sure and as immutable as that which His saints have in Christ. But, instead, He chose to set him in Eden on the basis of creature responsibility, so that he stood or fell according as he measured or failed to measure up to his responsibility obedience to his Maker. Adam stood accountable to God by the law which his Creator had given him. Here was responsibility, unimpaired responsibility, tested out under the most favorable conditions.

Now God did not place Adam upon a footing of conditional, creature responsibility, because it was right He should so place him. No, it was right because God did it. God did not even give creatures being because it was right for Him to do so, i. e., because He was under any obligations *to* create; but it was right because He did so. God is sovereign. His will is supreme. So far from God being under any law of "right," He is a law unto Himself, so that whatsoever *He* does *is* right. And woe be to the rebel that calls His sovereignty into question: "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker. Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the thing say to Him that fashioned it, What makest Thou?" (Isa. 45:9).

God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil.

Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it.

*Westminster Confession Of Faith – Chapter 9 "On Free Will"*

## 2. God Sovereignly Placed Israel Upon A Conditional Footing

The 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> chapters of Exodus afford a clear and full proof of this. They were placed under a covenant of works. God gave to them certain laws, and made national blessing for them depend upon their observance of His statutes. But Israel were stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart. They rebelled against Jehovah, forsook His law, turned unto false gods, apostatized. In consequence, Divine judgment fell upon them, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies, dispersed abroad throughout the earth, and remain under the heavy frown of God's displeasure to this day.

It was God in the exercise of His high sovereignty that placed Satan and his angels, Adam, Israel, in their respective *responsible* positions. But so far from His sovereignty taking away responsibility from the creature, it was by the exercise thereof that He placed them on this conditional footing, under such responsibilities as He thought proper; by virtue of which sovereignty, He is seen to be God over all. Thus, there is perfect harmony between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of the creature. Many have most foolishly said that it is quite impossible to show where Divine sovereignty ends and creature accountability begins. *Here is* where creature responsibility begins: in the sovereign ordination of the Creator. As to His sovereignty, there is not and never will be any "end" to it!

3. Whatsoever God Doeth Is Right - Let us give further proofs that **The responsibility of the creature is based upon God's sovereignty**. How many things are recorded in Scripture which were right because God *commanded* them, and which would *not* have been right had He not so commanded! What right had Adam to "eat" of the trees of the Garden? The permission of his Maker (Gen. 2:16), without such, he had been a thief! What right had Israel to "borrow" of the Egyptians' jewels and raiment (Ex. 12:35)? None, unless Jehovah had authorized it (Ex. 3:22). What right had Israel to slay so many lambs for sacrifice? None, except that God commanded it. What right had Israel to kill off all the Canaanites? None, save as Jehovah had bidden them. What right has the husband to require submission from his wife? None, unless God had appointed it. And so we might go on. Human responsibility *is based upon* Divine sovereignty.

4. One more example of the exercise of God's absolute sovereignty. **God placed His elect upon a *different* footing from Adam or Israel. He placed them upon an unconditional footing.** In the Everlasting Covenant Jesus Christ was appointed their Head, took their responsibilities upon Himself, and wrought out a righteousness for them which is perfect, indefeasible, eternal. Christ was placed upon a conditional footing, for He was "made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law," only with this infinite difference: the others failed, He did not and could not. And *who* placed Christ upon that conditional footing? The Triune God. It was sovereign will that appointed Him, sovereign love that sent Him, sovereign authority that assigned Him His work.

Certain conditions were set before the Mediator. He was to be made in the likeness of sin's flesh; He was to magnify the law and make it honorable; He was to bear all the sins of all God's people in His own body on the tree; He was to make full, atonement for them; He was to endure the outpoured wrath of God; He was to die and be buried. On the fulfillment of those conditions He was promised a reward: Isaiah 53:10-12. He was to be the Firstborn among many brethren; He was to have a people who should share His glory. Blessed be His name forever, He fulfilled those conditions, and because He did so, the Father stands pledged, on solemn oath, to preserve through time and bless throughout eternity every one of those for whom His incarnate Son mediated. Because He took their place, they now share His. His righteousness is theirs, His standing before God is theirs, His life is theirs. There is not a single condition for them to meet, not a single responsibility for them to discharge in order to attain their eternal bliss. "By one offering He *hath perfected* forever them that are set apart" (Heb. 10:14).

Here then is the sovereignty of God openly displayed before all, displayed in the *different* ways in which He has dealt with His creatures. **Part of the angels, Adam, Israel, were placed upon a conditional footing, continuance in blessing being made dependent upon *their* obedience and fidelity to God.**

In sharp contrast from them, **The "little flock" (Luke 12:32), have been given an unconditional, an immutable standing in God's covenant, God's counsels, God's Son; their blessing being made dependent upon what *Christ* did for them.** "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 1:19). The foundation on which God's elect stand is a perfect one: nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it (Eccl. 3:14). Here, then, is the highest and grandest display of the absolute sovereignty of God. Verily, He *has* "mercy on whom He will have mercy, and, whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18).

*Question # 5* - Do you find divine sovereignty and human responsibility difficult to reconcile? Do you find the author's description and argument in this chapter helpful?

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## A. The Sovereignty Of God And The Problem Of Evil

### 1. Is God the Author of Sin?

**Ecclesiastes 7: 29** - Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices

If by 'the author of sin,' be meant the sinner, the agent, or the actor of sin, or the doer of a wicked thing . . . it would be a reproach and blasphemy, to suppose God to be the author of sin. In this sense, I utterly deny God to be the author of sin. Willing that sin exist in the world is not the same as sinning.

*Jonathan Edwards*

Edwards argues. God does not commit sin in willing that there be sin. Think of way the sun brings about light and warmth by its essential nature, but brings about dark and cold by dropping below the horizon. "If the sun were the proper cause of cold and darkness," he says, "it would be the fountain of these things, as it is the fountain of light and heat: and then something might be argued from the nature of cold and darkness, to a likeness of nature in the sun." In other words, "sin is not the fruit of any positive agency or influence of the most High, but on the contrary, arises from the withholding of his action and energy, and under certain circumstances, necessarily follows on the want of his influence."

Thus in one sense God wills that what he hates come to pass, as well as what he loves. Edwards says,

"God may hate a thing as it is in itself, and considered simply as evil, and yet . . . it may be his will it should come to pass, considering all consequences. . . . God doesn't will sin as sin or for the sake of anything evil; though it be his pleasure so to order things, that he permitting, sin will come to pass; for the sake of the great good that by his disposal shall be the consequence. His willing to order things so that evil should come to pass, for the sake of the contrary good, is no argument that he doesn't hate evil, as evil: and if so, then it is no reason why he many not reasonably forbid evil as evil, and punish it as such."

## **2. Why Does God Ordain That There Be Evil?**

It is evident from what has been said that it is not because he delights in evil as evil. God wills that evil come to pass so that good may come of it. What good? And how does the existence of evil serve this good end? Here is Edwards' stunning answer:

It is a proper and excellent thing for infinite glory to shine forth; and for the same reason, it is proper that the shining forth of God's glory should be complete; that is, that all parts of his glory should shine forth, that every beauty should be proportionably effulgent, that the beholder may have a proper notion of God. It is not proper that one glory should be exceedingly manifested, and another not at all.

*Jonathan Edwards*

Thus it is necessary, that God's awful majesty, his authority and dreadful greatness, justice, and holiness, should be manifested. But this could not be, unless sin and punishment had been decreed; so that the shining forth of God's glory would be very imperfect, both because these parts of divine glory would not shine forth as the others do, and also the glory of his goodness, love, and holiness would be faint without them; nay, they could scarcely shine forth at all.

If it were not right that God should decree and permit and punish sin, there could be no manifestation of God's holiness in hatred of sin, or in showing any preference, in His providence, of godliness before it. There would be no manifestation of God's grace or true goodness, if there was no sin to be pardoned, no misery to be saved from. How much happiness soever He bestowed, His goodness would not be so much prized and admired.

So evil is necessary, in order to the highest happiness of the creature, and the completeness of that communication of God, for which He made the world; because the creature's happiness consists in the knowledge of God, and the sense of His love. And if the knowledge of Him be imperfect, the happiness of the creature must be proportionably imperfect.'

**Question # 6** - How does God's sovereignty affect the way you view and react to the minor events that make up every day life?

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## THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

This is one of the Divine perfections which is not sufficiently pondered. It is one of the excellencies of the Creator which distinguishes Him from all His creatures. God is perpetually the same: subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations. Therefore God is compared to a *rock* (Deut 32:4, etc.) which remains immovable, when the entire ocean surrounding it is continually in a fluctuating state; even so, though all creatures are subject to change, God is immutable. Because God has no beginning and no ending, He can know no change. He is everlastingly "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17).

*The Attributes Of God – A. W. Pink*

**Question # 7** - How would your thoughts about God and relation to God be affected if the possibility existed that some aspect of Him might change?

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## The Immutability Of God Described

### A. God Is Immutable In His Essence

His nature and being are infinite, and so, subject to no mutations. There never was a time when He was not; there never will come a time when He shall cease to be. God has neither evolved, grown, nor improved. All that He is today, He has ever been, and ever will be.

**Malachi 3: 6** - I am the Lord, I change not

He is His own unqualified affirmation. He cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse. Altogether unaffected by anything outside Himself, improvement or deterioration is impossible. He is perpetually the same. He only can say, "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14). He is altogether uninfluenced by the flight of time. There is no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity. Therefore His power can never diminish nor His glory ever fade.

## **B. God Is Immutable In His Attributes**

Whatever the attributes of God were before the universe was called into existence, they are precisely the same now, and will remain so forever. Necessarily so; for they are the very perfections, the essential qualities of His being. *Semper idem* (always the same) is written across every one of them. His power is unabated, His wisdom undiminished, His holiness unsullied. The attributes of God can no more change than Deity can cease to be. His veracity is immutable. His Word is

**Psalms 119: 89** – Thy Word is forever settled in heaven

His love is eternal:

**Jeremiah 31: 3** - I have loved thee with an everlasting love

**John 13: 1** - Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end

His mercy ceases not, for it is "everlasting" (Ps. 100:5).

## **C. God Is Immutable In His Counsel**

His will never varies. Perhaps some are ready to object that we ought to read the following: "And it *repented* the Lord that He had made man" (Gen. 6:6). Our first reply is, Then do the Scriptures contradict themselves? No, that cannot be.

**Numbers 23: 19** - God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent

**1 Samuel 15: 19** - The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent

**Romans 11: 29** – The gifts and calling of God are without repentance

The explanation is very simple. When speaking of Himself. God frequently accommodates His language to our limited capacities. He describes Himself as clothed with bodily members, as eyes, ears, hands, etc. He speaks of Himself as "waking" (Ps. 78:65), as "rising early" (Jer. 7:13); yet He neither slumbers nor sleeps. When He institutes a *change in His dealings* with men, He describes His course of conduct as "repenting."

*The Attributes Of God – A. W. Pink*

Yes, God is immutable in His counsel. It must be so, for "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth" (Job 23:13). Change and decay in all around we see, may He who changeth not abide with thee. God's purpose never alters. One of two things causes a man to change his mind and reverse his plans: want of foresight to anticipate everything, or lack of power to execute them. But as God is both omniscient and omnipotent there is never any need for Him to revise His decrees. No. "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). Therefore do we read of "the immutability of His counsel" (Heb. 6:17).



**Question # 8** - How would you explain the biblical reality that God interacts with men in time and space seemingly reacting to various circumstances while remaining immutable in His counsel?

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### **The Immutability Of God Contrasted With Man**

Herein we may perceive the infinite distance which separates the highest creature from the Creator. Creaturehood and mutability are correlative terms. If the creature was not mutable by nature, it would not be a creature; it would be God. By nature we tend to nothing, as we came from nothing. Nothing stays our annihilation but the will and sustaining power of God. None can sustain himself a single moment. We are entirely dependent on the Creator for every breath we draw. We gladly own with the Psalmist Thou "holdest our soul in life" (Ps. 66:9). The realization of this ought to make us lie down under a sense of our own nothingness in the presence of Him "in Whom we live and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

**Jude 12 - 13** – These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.

**Genesis 49: 3 - 4** – Reuben, you are my firstborn; in my might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it--he went up to my couch.

Hallelujah, praise Jehovah, O my soul, Jehovah praise; I will sing the glorious praises Of my God through all my days. Put no confidence in princes, Nor for help on man depend; He shall die, to dust returning, And his purposes shall end.
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As fallen creatures we are not only mutable, but everything in us is *opposed* to God. As such we are "wandering stars" (Jude 13), out of our proper orbit. The wicked are "like the troubled sea, when it *cannot rest*" (Isa. 57:20). Fallen man is inconstant. The words of Jacob concerning Reuben apply with full force to all of Adam's descendants: "unstable as water" (Gen. 49:4). Thus it is not only a mark of piety, but also the part of wisdom to heed that injunction, "cease ye *from man*" (Isa. 2:22). No human being is to be depended on. "Put not your trust in princes, in the son of man, in whom is *no help*" (Ps. 146:3). If I disobey God, then I deserve to be deceived and disappointed by my fellows. People who like you today, may hate you tomorrow. The multitude who cried "Hosanna to the Son of David," speedily changed to "Away with Him, Crucify Him."

**Question # 9** - In what ways do you change? How does reflecting on this increase your amazement at the immutability of God?

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## **The Immutability Of God Applied**

### **A. The Immutability Of God Is Solid Comfort**

Human nature cannot be relied upon; but God can! However unstable I may be, however fickle my friends may prove, God changes not. If He varied as we do, if He willed one thing today and another tomorrow, if He were controlled by caprice, who could confide in Him? But, all praise to His glorious name, He is ever the same. His purpose is fixed, His will stable, His word is sure. Here then is a *rock* on which we may fix our feet, while the mighty torrent is sweeping away everything around us. The permanence of God's character guarantees the fulfillment of His promises: "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. 54:10).

### **B. The Immutability Of God Is Encouragement To Prayer**

"What comfort would it be to pray to a god that, like the chameleon, changed color every moment? Who would put up a petition to an earthly prince that was so mutable as to grant a petition one day, and deny it another?" (S. Charnock, 1670). Should someone ask, But what is the use of praying to One whose will is already fixed? We answer, Because He so requires it. What blessings has God promised without our seeking them? "If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14), and He *has* willed everything that is for His child's good. To ask for anything contrary to His will is not prayer, but rank rebellion.

### **C. The Immutability Of God Is Terror For The Wicked**

Those who defy Him, break His laws, have no concern for His glory, but live their lives as though He existed not, must not suppose that, when at the last they shall cry to Him for mercy, He will alter His will, revoke His word, and rescind His awful threatenings. No, He has declared, "Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (Ezek. 8:18). God will not deny Himself to gratify their lusts. God is holy, unchangingly so. Therefore God hates sin, eternally hates it. Hence the *eternality* of the punishment of all who die in their sins.

The Divine immutability, like the cloud which interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptian army, has a dark as well as a light side. It insures the execution of His threatenings, as well as the performance of His promises; and destroys the hope which the guilty fondly cherish, that He will be all lenity to His frail and erring creatures, and that they will be much more lightly dealt with than the declarations of His own Word would lead us to expect. We oppose to these deceitful and presumptuous speculations the solemn truth, that God is unchanging in veracity and purpose, in faithfulness and justice. (J. Dick, 1850).

**Question # 10** - What makes the immutability of God comforting to you? How might this affect the way you view and deal with the myriad of things in your life that do change?

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## PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK

Read Chapters 10 & 11 – The Faithfulness Of God and The Goodness Of God

*Question # 1* - Use your own words to define in one sentence the faithfulness of God.

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*Question # 2* - In what kinds of circumstances and situations are you tempted to doubt the faithfulness of God? Why do we doubt God's faithfulness at times?

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*Question # 3* - List one promise of God that we see fulfilled in Scripture. List one promise that we will see fulfilled in the future.

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*Question # 4* - How does the faithfulness of God encourage you in the realm of evangelism?

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*Question # 5* - How might a constant awareness of God's faithfulness to His promises affect the way you think and live day to day?

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*Question # 6* - What is goodness? Give a definition and an example of goodness demonstrated.

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*Question # 7* - What do you think prevents us from seeing God's goodness in the world around us from day to day?

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*Question # 8* - Where would you be and in what condition would you be without God's goodness?

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*Question # 9* - How is the goodness of God displayed most supremely in Christ and His work of redemption?

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*Question # 10* - What is your response to beholding God's goodness? What effect might it have on your life?

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# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 8 – 23 January 2011

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## FAITHFULNESS / GOODNESS

### THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Unfaithfulness is one of the most outstanding sins of these evil days. In the business world, a man's word is, with exceedingly rare exceptions, no longer his bond. In the social world, marital infidelity abounds on every hand, the sacred bonds of wedlock being broken with as little regard as the discarding of an old garment. In the ecclesiastical realm, thousands who have solemnly covenanted to preach the truth make no scruple to attack and deny it. Nor can reader or writer claim complete immunity from this fearful sin: in how many ways have we been unfaithful to Christ, and to the light and privileges which God has entrusted to us!

Reader, never suppose, amid the faithlessness of earth's trusted friends, that you are doomed to thread your way in loneliness and solitude. There is more than one 'Emmaus journey'. The "abiding" Friend is still here! He is always the same. "He faints not, neither is weary!" His faithfulness is a tried faithfulness. His word is a tried word. His friendship is a tried friendship. He is always better than His word. He pays 'with interest'!

*The Faithfulness Of God - John MacDuff*

How refreshing, then, how unspeakably blessed, to lift our eyes above this scene of ruin, and behold One who *is* faithful, faithful in all things, faithful at all times.

**Deuteronomy 7: 9** - Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the *faithful* God

This quality is essential to His being, without it He would not be God. For God to be unfaithful would be to act contrary to His nature, which were impossible:

**2 Timothy 2: 13** - If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself

Faithfulness is one of the glorious perfections of His being. He is as it were clothed with it:

**Psalms 89: 8** - O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto Thee? or to Thy faithfulness *round about* Thee?

So too when God became incarnate it was said,

**Isaiah 11: 5** - Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins

**Psalms 36: 5** - Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness unto the clouds

Far above all finite comprehension is the unchanging faithfulness of God. Everything about God is great, vast, incomparable. He never forgets, never fails, never falters, never forfeits His word. To every declaration of promise or prophecy the Lord has exactly adhered, every engagement of covenant or threatening He will make good, for

**Numbers 23: 19** - God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?

Therefore does the believer exclaim,

**Lamentations 3: 22 – 23** - His compassions fail not, they are new every morning:  
*great* is Thy faithfulness

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.

Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness,  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

*Great Is Thy Faithfulness - Thomas Obadiah Chisholm*

Scripture abounds in illustrations of God's faithfulness. More than four thousand years ago He said,

**Genesis 8: 22** - While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease

Every year that comes furnishes a fresh witness to God's fulfillment of this promise. In Genesis 15 we find that Jehovah declared unto Abraham, "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them. . . . But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again" (vv. 13-16). Centuries ran their weary course. Abraham's descendants groaned amid the brick-kilns of Egypt. Had God forgotten His promise? No, indeed. Read Exodus 12:41, "And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."

Through Isaiah the Lord declared,

**Isaiah 7: 14** - Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel

Again centuries passed, but "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman" (Gal 4:4).

It is not surprising that this aspect of God's nature should also belong to the Messiah, who would be clothed with faithfulness (Is. 11:5) and who is described as the Faithful one (Rev. 19:11), the "faithful witness" (Rev. 1:5; 3:14), and the "faithful High Priest" (Heb. 2:17; 3:2). God's faithfulness is the source of the Christian's deliverance from temptation (1 Cor. 10:13), assurance of salvation (Heb. 10:23), and forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:9). He is faithful to His children because He is first of all faithful to Himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

God is true. His Word of Promise is sure. In all His relations with His people God is faithful. He may be safely relied upon. No one ever yet really trusted Him in vain. We find this precious truth expressed almost everywhere in the Scriptures, for His people need to know that faithfulness is an essential part of the Divine character. This is the basis of our confidence in Him. But it is one thing to accept the faithfulness of God as a Divine truth, it is quite another *to act upon it*. God has given us many "exceeding great and precious promises," but are we really counting on His fulfillment of them? Are we actually *expecting* Him to do for us all that He has said? Are we resting with implicit assurance on these words,

**Hebrews 10: 23** - He is faithful that promised

*Question # 1* - Use your own words to define in one sentence the faithfulness of God.

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- Great - Lam 3:23
- Established - Ps 89:2
- Incomparable - Ps 89:8
- Unfailing - Ps 89:33; 2 Tim 2:13
- Infinite - Ps 36:5
- Everlasting - Ps 119:90; 146:6
- Should be pleaded in prayer - Ps 143:1
- Should be proclaimed - Ps 40:10; 89:1

This attribute is an indisputable part of his character - Is 49:7; 1 Cor 1:9; 1 Thess 5:24

Faithfulness in God is described as dependability, loyalty, and stability, particularly as it describes God in His relationship to human believers. The faithfulness of God and His Word is a constant theme in the Bible.

### **God's Faithfulness In Affliction**

**Psalms 119: 75** - I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments *are* right , and *that* Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me

There are seasons in the lives of all when it is not easy, no not even for Christians, to believe that God *is* faithful. Our faith is sorely tried, our eyes bedimmed with tears, and we can no longer trace the outworkings of His love. Our ears are distracted with the noises of the world, harassed by the atheistic whisperings of Satan, and we can no longer hear the sweet accents of His still small voice. Cherished plans have been thwarted, friends on whom we relied have failed us, a profest brother or sister in Christ has betrayed us. We are staggered. We sought to be faithful to God, and now a dark cloud hides Him from us. We find it difficult, yea, impossible, for carnal reason to harmonize His frowning providence with His gracious promises. Ah, faltering soul, severely-tried fellow-pilgrim, seek grace to heed

**Isaiah 50: 10** - Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and *stay upon his God*

**Question # 2** - In what kinds of circumstances and situations are you tempted to doubt the faithfulness of God? Why do we doubt God's faithfulness at times?

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When you are tempted to doubt the faithfulness of God, cry out, "Get thee hence, Satan." Though you cannot now harmonize God's mysterious dealings with the avowals of His love, wait on Him for more light. In His own good time He will make it plain to you. "What I do thou knowest not *now*, but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7). The sequel will yet demonstrate that God has neither forsaken nor deceived His child. "And therefore will the Lord wait that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they *that wait for Him*" (Isa. 30:18).

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace,  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.  
Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,  
The clouds ye so much dread,  
Are rich with mercy, and shall break  
In blessing o'er your head.

*God Moves In A Mysterious Way - William Cowper*

**Psalms 119: 138** - Thy testimonies which Thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful

God has not only told us the best, but He has not withheld the worst. He has faithfully described the ruin which the Fall has effected. He has faithfully diagnosed the terrible state which sin has produced. He has faithfully made known his inveterate hatred of evil, and that He must punish the same. He has faithfully warned us that He is "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Not only does His Word abound in illustrations of His fidelity in fulfilling His promises, but it also records numerous examples of His faithfulness in making good His threatenings. Every stage of Israel's history exemplifies that solemn fact. So it was with individuals: Pharaoh, Korah, Achan and a host of others are so many proofs. And thus it will be with *you*, my reader: unless you have fled or do flee to Christ for refuge, the everlasting burning of the Lake of Fire will be your sure and certain portion.

### **How God Is Faithful**

- In his counsels - Is 25:1
- In fulfilling his promises - 1 Kin 8:20; Ps 132:11; 119: 138; Mic 7:20; Heb 10:23
- In keeping his covenant - Deut 7:9; Ps 111:5
- In executing his judgments - Jer 23:20; 51:29
- In forgiving sins - 1 John 1:9
- Saints encouraged to depend on - 1 Pet 4:19
- Should be magnified - Ps 89:5; 92:2
- To his saints - Ps 89:24; 2 Thess 3:3

**God Is Faithful In Preserving His People** - "God is faithful, by whom ye are called unto the fellowship of His Son" (1 Cor. 1:9). In the previous verse promise was made that God would confirm unto the end His own people. The Apostle's confidence in the absolute

security of believers was founded not on the strength of their resolutions or ability to persevere, but on the veracity of Him that cannot lie. Since God has promised to His Son a certain people for His inheritance, to deliver them from sin and condemnation, and to make them participants of eternal life in glory, it is certain that He will not allow any of them to perish.

**God Is Faithful In Disciplining His People** - He is faithful in what He withholds, no less than in what He gives. He is faithful in sending sorrow as well as in giving joy. The faithfulness of God is a truth to be confessed by us not only when we are at ease, but also when we are smarting under the sharpest rebuke. Nor must this confession be merely of our mouths, but of our hearts, too. When God smites us with the rod of chastisement, it is *faithfulness* which wields it. To acknowledge this means that we humble ourselves before Him, own that we fully deserve His correction, and instead of murmuring, thank Him for it. God never afflicts without reason. "For *this cause* many are weak and sickly among you" (1 Cor. 11:30), says Paul, illustrating this principle. When His rod falls upon us let us say with Daniel, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces" (9:7)

Trouble and affliction are not only consistent with God's love pledged in the everlasting covenant, but they are parts of the administration of the same. God is not only faithful notwithstanding afflictions, but faithful in sending them.

**Psalm 89: 32** - The will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes: My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him nor suffer My faithfulness to fail"

Chastening is not only reconcilable with God's lovingkindness, but it is the effect and expression of it. It would much quieten the minds of God's people if they would remember that His covenant love binds Him to lay on them seasonable correction. Afflictions are necessary for us:

**Hosea 5: 15** - In their affliction they will seek Me early

**God Is Faithful In Glorifying His People**

**1 Thessalonians 5: 24** - Faithful is He which calleth you, who also will do

The immediate reference here is to the saints being preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God treats with us not on the ground of our merits (for we have none), but for His own great name's sake. God is constant to Himself and to His own purpose of grace whom He called. . . them He also glorified

**Romans 8: 28**— And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

29 For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified.

31 What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?

32 He that spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

God gives a full demonstration of the constancy of His everlasting goodness toward His elect by effectually calling them out of darkness into His marvelous light, and this should



fully assure them of the certain continuance of it. The foundation of God standeth sure (2 Tim. 2:19). Paul was resting on the faithfulness of God when he said,

**2 Timothy 1: 12** - I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day

### **The Benefit From Contemplation Of God's Faithfulness**

**Anticipating God's Faithfulness Preserves Us From Worry** - To be full of care, to view our situation with dark forebodings, to anticipate the morrow with sad anxiety, is to reflect upon the faithfulness of God. He who has cared for His child through all the years, will not forsake him in old age. He who has heard your prayers in the past, will not refuse to supply your need in the present emergency. Rest on Job 5:19, "He *shall* deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall be no evil touch thee."

**Anticipating God's Faithfulness Checks Our Murmurings** - The Lord knows what is best for each of us, and one effect of resting on this truth will be the silencing of our petulant complainings. God is greatly honored when, under trial and chastening, we have good thoughts of Him, vindicate His wisdom and justice, and recognize His love in His very rebukes.

**Anticipating God's Faithfulness Increases Confidence In God** - "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. 4:19). When we trustfully resign ourselves, and all our affairs into God's hands, fully persuaded of His love and faithfulness, the sooner shall we be satisfied with his providence and realize that "He doeth *all* things well."

**Question # 3** - List one promise of God that we see fulfilled in Scripture. List one promise that we will see fulfilled in the future.

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**Question # 4** - How does the faithfulness of God encourage you in the realm of evangelism?

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**Question # 5** - How might a constant awareness of God's faithfulness to His promises affect the way you think and live day to day?

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## THE GOODNESS OF GOD

### **Psalm 52: 1** - The goodness of God endureth continually

The goodness" of God respects the perfection of His nature: "God is light, and in Him is *no* darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). There is such an absolute perfection in God's nature and being that nothing is wanting to it or defective in it, and nothing can be added to it to make it better.

He is originally good, good of Himself, which nothing else is; for all creatures are good only by participation and communication from God. He is essentially good; not only good, but goodness itself: the creature's good is a superadded quality, in God it is His essence.

He is infinitely good; the creature's good is but a drop, but in God there is an infinite ocean or gathering together of good. He is eternally and immutably good, for He cannot be less good than He is; as there can be no addition made to Him, so no subtraction from Him.

*Thomas Manton*

God is *summum bonum*, the chiefest good.

The original Saxon meaning of our English word "God" is "The Good." God is not only the Greatest of all beings, but the Best. All the goodness there is in any creature has been imparted from the Creator, but God's goodness is underived, for it is the essence of His eternal nature.

*The Attributes Of God – A.W. Pink*

As God is infinite in power from all eternity, before there was any display thereof, or any act of omnipotency put forth; so He was eternally good before there was any communication of His bounty, or any creature to whom it might be imparted or exercised. Thus, the first manifestation of this Divine perfection was in giving being to all things.

### **Psalm 119: 68** - Thou art good, and doest good

God has in Himself an infinite and inexhaustible treasure of all blessedness enough to fill all things.

**Question # 6** - What is goodness? Give a definition and an example of goodness demonstrated.

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## **God's Goodness Seen In Creation**

All that emanates from God—His decrees, His creation, His laws, His providences—cannot be otherwise than good: as it is written.

**Genesis 1: 31** - And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was *very good*

Thus, the "goodness" of God is *seen*, first, in Creation. The more closely the creature is studied, the more the beneficence of its Creator becomes apparent. Take the highest of God's earthly creatures, man. Abundant reason has he to say with the Psalmist

**Psalm 139: 14** - I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well

Everything about the structure of our bodies attests the goodness of their Maker. How suited the bands to perform their allotted work! How good of the Lord to appoint sleep to refresh the wearied body! How benevolent His provision to give unto the eyes lids and brows for their protection! And so we might continue indefinitely.

Nor is the goodness of the Creator confined to man, it is exercised toward all His creatures.

**Psalm 145: 15, 16** - The eyes of all wait upon Thee; and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing

Whole volumes might be written, yea have been, to amplify this fact. Whether it be the birds of the air, the beasts of the forest, or the fish in the sea, abundant provision has been made to supply their every need. God "giveth food to all flesh, for His mercy endureth forever" (Ps. 136:25).

Truly,

**Psalm 33: 5** - The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord

**God's Goodness Seen In Natural Pleasures** - The goodness of God is seen in the variety of natural pleasures which He has provided for His creatures. God might have been pleased to satisfy our hunger without the food being pleasing to our palates—how His benevolence appears in the varied flavors which He has given to meats, vegetables, and fruits! God has not only given us senses, but also that which gratifies them; and this too reveals His goodness. The earth might have been as fertile as it is without its surface being so delightfully variegated. Our physical lives could have been sustained without beautiful flowers to regale our eyes, and exhale sweet perfumes. We might have walked the fields without our ears being saluted by the music of the birds. Whence, then, this loveliness, this charm, so freely diffused over the face of nature? Verily, "The *tender* mercies of the Lord are over *all* His works" (Ps. 145:9).

Question # 7 - What do you think prevents us from seeing God's goodness in the world around us from day to day?

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**God's Goodness Seen In Forebearance** - The goodness of God is seen in that when man transgressed the law of His Creator a dispensation of unmixed wrath did not at once commence. Well might God have deprived His fallen creatures of every blessing, every comfort, every pleasure. Instead, He ushered in a regime of a mixed nature, of mercy and judgment. This is very wonderful if it be duly considered, and the more thoroughly that regime be examined the more will it appear that "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (Jas. 2:13). Notwithstanding all the evils which attend our fallen state, the balance of good greatly preponderates. With comparatively rare exceptions, men and women experience a far greater number of days of health, than they do of sickness and pain. There is much more creature—happiness than creature—misery in the world. Even our sorrows admit of considerable alleviation, and God has given to the human mind a pliability which adapts itself to circumstances and makes the most of them.

Question # 8 - Where would you be and in what condition would you be without God's goodness?

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**God's Goodness Seen In Afflictions** - Nor can the benevolence of God be justly called into question because there is suffering and sorrow in the world. If man *sins against* the goodness of God, if he despises "the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering," and after the hardness and impenitency of his heart treasureth up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath (Rom 2:5,5), who is to blame but himself? Would God *be* "good" if He punished not those who ill-use His blessings, abuse His benevolence, and trample His mercies beneath their feet? It will be no reflection upon God's goodness, but rather the brightest exemplification of it, when He shall rid the earth of those who have broken His laws, defied His authority, mocked His messengers, scorned His Son, and persecuted those for whom He died.

**God's Goodness Seen In Redemption** - The goodness of God appeared most illustriously when He sent forth His Son "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4, 5). Then it was that a multitude of the heavenly host praised their Maker and said, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good-will toward men" (Luke 2:14). Yes, in the Gospel the "*grace* (Gk. *benevolence* or *goodness*) of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). Nor can God's benignity be called into question because He has not made every sinful creature to be a subject of His redemptive grace. He did not the fallen angels. Had God left all to perish it had been no reflection on His *goodness*. To any who would challenge this statement we will remind him of our Lord's

sovereign prerogative: "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Matt. 20:15).

*Question # 9* - How is the goodness of God displayed most supremely in Christ and His work of redemption?

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### **God's Goodness And Our Response**

**Gratitude – The Response Of His Children** - "O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men" (Ps. 107:8).

Gratitude is the return justly required from the objects of His beneficence; yet is it often withheld from our great Benefactor simply because His goodness is so constant and so abundant. It is lightly esteemed because it is exercised toward us in the common course of events. It is not felt because we daily experience it.

The goodness of God is the life of the believer's trust. It is this excellency in God which most appeals to our hearts. Because His goodness endureth forever, we ought never to be discouraged: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (Nahum 1:7).

When others behave badly to us, it should only stir us up the more heartily to give thanks unto the Lord, because *He* is good; and when we ourselves are conscious that we are far from being good, we should only the more reverently bless Him that *He* is good. We must never tolerate an instant's unbelief as to the goodness of the Lord; whatever else may be questioned, this is absolutely certain, that Jehovah is good; His dispensations may vary, but His nature is always the same.

*C. H. Spurgeon*

### **Warnings Concerning God's Goodness**

**Do Not Despise** - "Despisest *thou* the riches of His goodness?" (Rom. 2:4). His goodness is "despised" when it is not improved as a means to lead men to repentance, but, on the contrary, serves to harden them from the supposition that God entirely overlooks their sin.

### **Abundant Goodness In This Life Is No Guarantee**

*Question # 10* - What is your response to beholding God's goodness? What effect might it have on your life?

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## **Bible Quotes on God's Faithfulness to His Children**

**Deuteronomy 4:31** - For the LORD your God is a merciful God; He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which He confirmed to them by oath.

**Deuteronomy 7:9** - Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep His commands.

**Deuteronomy 32:4** - He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He.

**Numbers 23:19** - God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change his mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfill?

**1 Kings 8:20** - The LORD has kept the promise He made: I have succeeded David my father and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD promised, and I have built the temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel.

**1 Samuel 15:29** - He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man, that He should change his mind."

**1 Kings 8:56** - Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel just as He promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises He gave through His servant Moses.

**Psalms 9:10** - Those who know Your name will trust in You, for You, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek You.

**Psalms 36:5** - Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, Your faithfulness to the skies.

**Psalms 40:10** - I do not hide Your righteousness in my heart; I speak of Your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal Your love and Your truth from the great assembly.

**Psalms 89:2, 8** - I will declare that Your love stands firm forever, that You established Your faithfulness in heaven itself... O LORD God Almighty, who is like You? You are mighty, O LORD, and Your faithfulness surrounds you.

**Psalms 89:33** - I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.

**Psalms 92:1-2** - It is good to praise the LORD and make music to Your name, O Most High, to proclaim Your love in the morning and Your faithfulness at night,

**Psalms 105:8** - He remembers His covenant forever, the word He commanded, for a thousand generations

**Psalms 111:5** - He provides food for those who fear Him; He remembers His covenant forever.

**Psalms 117** - Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD.

**Psalms 119:89-90** - Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; You established the earth, and it endures.

**Psalms 119:160** - All Your words are true; all Your righteous laws are eternal.

**Psalms 143:1** - O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in Your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief.

**Isaiah 25:1** - O LORD, You are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago.

**Isaiah 46:11** - What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.

**Isaiah 49:7** - This is what the LORD says— the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel— to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

**Isaiah 54:10** - Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, Who has compassion on you.

**Lamentations 3:22-24** - Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

**Romans 3:3-4** - What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that You may be proved right when You speak and prevail when You judge."

**1 Corinthians 1:9** - God, Who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

**1 Corinthians 10:13** - No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

**2 Corinthians 1:20** - For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

**1 Thessalonians 5:23-24** - May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one Who calls you is faithful and He will do it.

**Hebrews 10:23** - Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.

**I John 1:9** - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

**Revelation 19:11** - I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war.

## **PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK**

Read Chapter 8 – The Holiness Of God

*Question # 1* - Holiness speaks of the separateness of God. In what ways is God separate from His creation? What aspect of God's separateness does the author emphasize in this chapter?

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*Question # 2* - In what sense does God's holiness characterize all of His other attributes? Give an example of what this means.

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*Question # 3* - In your own words, describe how God's holiness is displayed most perfectly at the cross of Christ.

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*Question # 4* - What does divine holiness do to our misguided efforts to earn merit before God or boast in our own righteousness? What effect might reflecting on these truths have on your coming week?

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*Question # 5* - How does the holiness of God make the goodness of God in Christ sweeter to your taste? Explain.

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*Question # 6* - Why and how are believers to pursue moral holiness in their lives?

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# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 9 – 30 January 2011

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## THE HOLINESS OF GOD

**Revelation 15: 4** - Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy

### The Holiness Of God Illustrated

He only is independently, infinitely, immutably holy. In Scripture He is frequently styled "The Holy One": He is so because the sum of all moral excellency is found in Him. He is absolute Purity, unsullied even by the shadow of sin.

**1 John 1: 5** - God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all

Holiness is the very excellency of the Divine nature: the great God is "glorious in holiness" (Ex. 15:11). Therefore do we read,

**Habbakuk 1: 13** - Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity

As God's power is the opposite of the native weakness of the creature, as His wisdom is in complete contrast from the least defect of understanding or folly, so His holiness is the very antithesis of all moral blemish or defilement. Of old God appointed singers in Israel "that they should praise for the beauty of holiness" (2 Chron. 20:21).

Power is God's hand or arm, omniscience His eye, mercy His bowels, eternity His duration, but holiness is His beauty.
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*Stephen Charnock*

It is this, supremely, which renders Him lovely to those who are delivered from sin's dominion.

A chief emphasis is placed upon this perfection of God: God is oftener styled Holy than almighty, and set forth by this part of His dignity more than by any other. This is more fixed on as an epithet to His name than any other. You never find it expressed 'His mighty name' or 'His wise name,' but His *great* name, and most of all, His *holy* name. This is the greatest title of honour; in this latter doth the majesty and venerableness of His name appear (S. Charnock).

This perfection, as none other, is solemnly celebrated before the Throne of Heaven, the seraphim crying,

**Isaiah 6: 3** - Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts

God Himself singles out this perfection,

**Psalms 89: 35** - Once have I sworn by Thy holiness

God swears by His holiness because that is a *fuller* expression of Himself than anything else. Therefore are we exhorted,

**Psalm 30: 4** - Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness

This may be said to be a transcendental attribute, that, as it were, runs through the rest, and casts luster upon them. It is an attribute of attributes

*John Howe*

Thus we read of "the *beauty* of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4), which is none other than "the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 110:3).

### **The Holiness Of God – Defined As Separate**

The root meaning of the Hebrew noun "holiness" (*qodes*) and the adjective "holy" (*qados*) comes from a word that means "to cut" or "to separate," and thus to be *distinct from* and *set apart*. That the term did not originally refer to ethical purity is seen from its use in describing *prostitutes*(!) who were "set apart" or "devoted" to pagan deities such as Baal and Asherah (see Gen. 38:21; Hosea 4:14).

**Question # 1** - Holiness speaks of the separateness of God. In what ways is God separate from His creation? What aspect of God's separateness does the author emphasize in this chapter?

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### **The Holiness Of God – Defined As Pure And Morally Excellent**

We often speak of something that is outstanding or has superior excellence as being "a cut above" the rest. That is what God is.

He is an infinite cut above everything else.

*The Holiness of God – R. C. Sproul*

Holiness, then, is not primarily a reference to moral or ethical purity. It is a reference to transcendence. So where does the concept of purity come from? Sproul explains:

We are so accustomed to equating holiness with purity or ethical perfection that we look for the idea when the word *holy* appears. When things are made holy, when they are consecrated, they are set apart unto purity. They are to be used in a pure way. They are to reflect purity as well as simply apartness. Purity is not excluded from the idea of the holy; it is contained within it. But the point we must remember is that the idea of the holy is never exhausted by the idea of purity. It includes purity but is much more than that. It is purity and transcendence. It is a ***transcendent purity***

*The Holiness of God – R. C. Sproul*

Holiness, then, is ***that in virtue of which God alone is God alone. Holiness is moral majesty***. This unmistakable biblical emphasis on the transcendent inviolability of God runs counter to the tendency in some theological circles to merge God with his creation.

As it seems to challenge an excellency above all His other perfections, so it is the glory of all the rest; as it is the glory of the Godhead, so it is the glory of every perfection in the Godhead; as His power is the strength of them, so His holiness is the beauty of them; as all would be weak without almightiness to back them, so all would be uncomely without holiness to adorn them. Should this be sullied, all the rest would lose their honour; as at the same instant the sun should lose its light, it would lose its heat, its strength, its generative and quickening virtue. As sincerity is the luster of every grace in a Christian, so is purity the splendor of every attribute in the Godhead. His justice is a holy justice, His wisdom a holy wisdom, His arm of power a "holy arm" (Ps. 98:1), His truth or promise a "holy promise" (Ps. 105:42). His name, which signifies all His attributes in conjunction, "is holy," Psalm 103:1 (S. Charnock).

Neither the writer nor the reader of these words is qualified to appreciate the holiness of God. Quite literally a new channel must be cut through the desert of our minds to allow the sweet waters of truth that will heal our great sickness to flow in. We cannot grasp the true meaning of the divine holiness by thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we are capable of.

God's holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered. We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable... Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard.

*Knowledge Of The Holy - A.W. Tozer*

**Question # 2** - In what sense does God's holiness characterize all of His other attributes? Give an example of what this means.

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Without the holiness of God, sin has no meaning and grace has no point, for it is God's holiness that gives to the one its definition and to the other its greatness. Without the holiness of God, sin is merely human failure but not failure before God, in relation to God. It is failure without the standard by which we know it to have fallen short. It is failure without the presumption of guilt, failure without retribution, failure without any serious moral meaning.

And without the holiness of God, grace is no longer grace because it does not arise from the dark clouds of judgment that obscured the cross and exacted the damnation of the Son in our place. Furthermore, without holiness, grace loses its meaning as grace, a free gift of the God who, despite his holiness and because of his holiness, has reconciled sinners to himself in the death of his Son.

And without holiness, faith is but a confidence in the benevolence of life, or perhaps merely confidence in ourselves. Sin, grace, and faith are emptied of any but a passing meaning if they are severed from their roots in the holiness of God.

*God In The Wasteland – David F. Wells*

## The Holiness Of God – How Is God’s Holiness Known And Seen?

### A. God’s Holiness Is Manifested In His Works.

**Psalm 145: 17** - The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works

Nothing but that which is excellent can proceed from Him. Holiness is the rule of all His actions. At the beginning He pronounced all that He made "very good" (Gen. 1:31), which He could not have done had there been anything imperfect or unholy in them. Man was made "upright" (Eccl. 7:29), in the image and likeness of his Creator. The angels that fell were created holy, for we are told that they "kept not their first habitation" (Jude 6). Of Satan it is written,

**Ezekiel 28: 15** - Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee

### B. God’s Holiness Is Manifested In His Law

That law forbids sin in *all* of its modifications: in its most refined as well as its grossest forms, the intent of the mind as well as the pollution of the body, the secret desire as well as the overt act. Therefore do we read, The law is holy, and

**Romans 7: 12** – I confess the commandment holy, and just, and good

**Psalm 19: 8 – 9** - The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether

### C. God’s Holiness Is Manifested At The Cross

Wondrously and yet most solemnly does the Atonement display God’s infinite holiness and abhorrence of sin. How hateful must sin be to God for Him to punish it to its utmost deserts when it was imputed to His Son!

For God does not want to save us by our own but by an extraneous righteousness, one that does not originate in ourselves but comes to us from beyond ourselves, which does not arise on earth but comes from heaven.

*Martin Luther*

Upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die; another’s life, another’s death, I stake my whole eternity.

*Horatius Bonar*

Our answer to the devil’s charge is not an alibi, but a plea of guilty and a claim that the demands of justice have been satisfied in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*J. Russell Howden*

Not all the vials of judgment that have or shall be poured out upon the wicked world, nor the flaming furnace of a sinner's conscience, nor the irreversible sentence pronounced against the rebellious demons, nor the groans of the damned creatures, give such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, as the wrath of God let loose upon His Son. Never did Divine holiness appear more beautiful and lovely than at the time our Saviour's countenance was most marred in the midst of His dying groans. This Himself acknowledges in Psa. 22. When God had turned His smiling face from Him, and thrust His sharp knife into His heart, which forced that terrible cry from Him, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He adores this perfection—"Thou art holy," v. 3 (S. Charnock).

**Because God is holy He hates all sin.** He loves everything which is in conformity to His laws, and loathes everything which is contrary to it. His Word plainly declares,

**Proverbs 3: 32** - The froward is an abomination to the Lord

**Proverbs 15: 26** - The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord

It follows, therefore, that He must necessarily punish sin. Sin can no more exist without demanding His punishment than without requiring His hatred of it. God has often forgiven sinners, but He never forgives sin; and the sinner is only forgiven on the ground of Another having borne his punishment; for

**Hebrews 9: 22** - Without shedding of blood is no remission for sin

Therefore we are told,

**Nahum 1: 2** - The Lord will, take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth Wrath for His enemies

For one sin God banished our first parents from Eden. For one sin all the posterity of Ham fell under a curse which remains over them to this day (Gen. 9:21). For one sin Moses was excluded from Canaan, Elisha's servant smitten with leprosy, Ananias and Sapphira cut off out of the land of the living.

**Question # 3** - In your own words, describe how God's holiness is displayed most perfectly at the cross of Christ.

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### **The Holiness Of God – Not Conceived By Human Thought**

Herein we find proof for the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures. The unregenerate do not really believe in the holiness of God. Their conception of His character is altogether one-sided. They fondly hope that His mercy will override everything else.

**Psalms 50: 21** - Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as thyself

This is God's charge against them. They think only of a "god" patterned after their own evil hearts. Hence their continuance in a course of mad folly. Such is the holiness ascribed to the Divine nature and character in Scripture that it clearly demonstrates their superhuman origin. The character attributed to the "gods" of the ancients and of modern heathendom are the very reverse of that immaculate purity which pertains to the true God.

An ineffably holy God, who has the utmost abhorrence of all sin, was never invented by any of Adam's fallen descendants! The fact is that nothing makes more manifest the terrible depravity of man's heart and his enmity against the living God than to have set before him One who is infinitely and immutably holy. His own idea of *sin* is practically limited to what the world calls "crime." Anything short of that, man palliates as "defects," "mistakes," "infirmities," etc. And even where sin is owned at all, excuses and extenuations are made for it.

The "god" which the vast majority of professing Christians "love," is looked upon very much like an indulgent old man, who himself has no relish for folly, but leniently winks at the "indiscretions" of youth. But the Word says,

**Psalm 5: 5** - Thou hatest all workers of iniquity

**Psalm 7: 11** - God is angry with the wicked every day

But men refuse to believe in *this* God, and gnash their teeth when His hatred of sin is faithfully pressed upon their attention. No, sinful man was no more likely to devise a holy God than to create the Lake of fire in which he will be tormented for ever and ever.

### **The Holiness Of God – Not Achieved By Human Effort**

Because God is holy, acceptance with Him on the ground of creature doings is utterly impossible. A fallen creature could sooner create a world than produce that which would meet the approval of infinite Purity. Can darkness dwell with Light? Can the Immaculate One take pleasure in "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6)? The best that sinful man brings forth is defiled. A corrupt tree cannot bear good fruit. God would deny Himself, vilify His perfections, were He to account as righteous and holy that which is not so in itself; and nothing is so which has the least stain upon it contrary to the nature of God. But blessed be His name, that which His holiness demanded His grace has provided in Christ Jesus our Lord. Every poor sinner who has fled to Him for refuge stands "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). Hallelujah!

**Question # 4** - What does divine holiness do to our misguided efforts to earn merit before God or boast in our own righteousness? What effect might reflecting on these truths have on your coming week?

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**Question # 5** - How does the holiness of God make the goodness of God in Christ sweeter to your taste? Explain.

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### **The Holiness Of God – A Motivation To Worship**

Because God is holy the utmost reverence becomes our approaches unto Him.

**Psalm 89: 7** - God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all about Him

**Psalm 99: 5** - Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; He is holy

Yes, "at His *footstool*," in the lowest posture of humility, prostrate before Him. When Moses would approach unto the burning bush, God said, "put off thy shoes from off thy feet" (Ex. 3:5). He is to be served "with fear" (Ps. 2:11). Of Israel His demand was,

**Leviticus 10: 3** - I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified

The more our hearts are awed by His ineffable holiness, the more acceptable will be our approaches unto Him.

**Question** – How does the Holiness of God impact our worship as individuals or in a corporate setting?

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Ah, sirs, holiness is a flower that grows not in Nature's garden. Men are not born with holiness in their hearts, as they are born with tongues in their mouths: holiness is a divine offspring: it is a pearl of great price, that is to be found in no nature but a renewed nature, in no bosom but a sanctified bosom.

*Thomas Brooks*

### **The Holiness Of God – A Motivation To Man's Holiness**

Because God is holy we should desire to be conformed to Him. His command is,

**1 Peter 1: 16** - Be ye holy, for I am holy

We are not bidden to be omnipotent or omniscient as God is, but we are to be holy, and that "in *all* manner of deportment" (1 Pet. 1:15).

This is the prime way of honoring God. We do not so glorify God by elevated admiration, or eloquent expressions, or pompous services of Him, as when we aspire to a conversing with Him with unstained spirits, and live to Him in living like Him (S. Charnock).

We are not only to renounce evil, but to manifest the truth. We tell people the world is vain; let our lives manifest that it is so. We tell them that our home is above and that all these things are transitory. Does our dwelling look like it? O to live consistent lives!

*Hudson Taylor*

An insight into the holiness of God will always produce a life - style of repentance.

*J.C. Ryle*

**Question # 6** - Why and how are believers to pursue moral holiness in their lives?

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In his contemplation of God's Holiness, Calvin concluded that man is never sufficiently "touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state, until he has compared himself with God's majesty".

This self-awareness in turn inevitably leads to brokenness and pain, followed by confession and repentance. One need only reflect on the emotional spiritual anguish of Isaiah. His physical agony was but a portrait of his spiritual discomfiture. True knowledge of God always leads to repentance. This in turn leads to cleansing and forgiveness. The holiness of God that first hurts, then heals. Finally, cleansing leads to commissioning. Mercy leads to ministry. Having seen God, what else is there to say but:

**Isaiah 6: 8** - Here am I Lord. Send me

Then as God alone is the Source and Fount of holiness, let us earnestly seek holiness from Him; let our daily prayer be that He may

**1 Thessalonians 5: 23** - Sanctify us *wholly*; and our whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"

## **PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK**

### **Read Chapter 16 – The Wrath Of God**

**Question # 1** - What is it that makes men hate or at least want to avoid the doctrine of the wrath of God?

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**Question # 2** - Why should the believer delight and rejoice in the wrath of God? Is there a right and wrong way to do this?

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**Question # 3** - Describe the two greatest displays of wrath portrayed in Scripture you can think of. What is your response to these?

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**Question # 4** - Do you view sin as God does? How can we grow to view our sin more accurately?

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**Question # 5** - As you reflect on the fury of God's righteous wrath against sin how is your view of Christ and His work affected?

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**Question # 6** - What practical applications flow from the doctrine of the wrath of God?

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# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 10 – 6 February 2011

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## THE WRATH OF GOD

When we speak about the *justice* of God, we have in mind the idea that God always acts in perfect conformity and harmony with his own character. Some suggest that justice is thus a synonym for *righteousness*. Whatever God is, says, or does, by virtue of the fact that it is *God*, makes it righteous. Right and wrong are simply, and respectively, what God either commands or forbids. In other words, God doesn't do or command something because it is right. It is right because it is done or commanded by God. Righteousness or rectitude or good do not exist independently of God as a law or rule or standard to which God adheres or conforms. Rather, righteousness or rectitude or good are simply *God acting and speaking*.

*Justice*, therefore, is God acting and speaking in conformity with who he is. To say that God is *just* is to say that he acts and speaks consistently with whatever his righteous nature requires. To be *unjust* is to act and speak inconsistently with whatever his righteous nature requires. That, of course, is a contradiction. That would be to assert that the righteous God acts unrighteously. By definition, that is impossible.

Our primary concern here is with what has been called the ***retributive justice*** of God, or that which God's nature requires him to require of his creatures. Retributive justice is that in virtue of which God gives to each of us that which is our due. It is that in virtue of which God treats us according to our deserts. Retributive justice is thus somewhat synonymous with *punishment*. This is a *necessary* expression of God's reaction to sin and evil.

Retributive justice is not something which God may or may not exercise, as is the case with mercy, love, and grace. Retributive justice, i.e., punishment for sin, is a matter of *debt*. It is something from which God cannot refrain doing lest he violate the rectitude and righteousness of his nature and will. **Sin must be punished**. It is a serious misunderstanding of Christianity and the nature of forgiveness to say that believers are those whose guilt is rescinded and whose sins are not punished. Our guilt and sin were fully imputed to our substitute, Jesus, who suffered the retributive justice in our stead.

An excellent illustration of this principle is found in Psalm 103:10. I have defined *retributive justice* as that in God's nature which requires him to deal with us according to our sins and reward us according to our iniquities.

**Psalm 103: 10** - God has NOT dealt with us according to our sins, NOR rewarded us according to our iniquities!

Indeed, according to v. 12, we are told that "as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Does this mean, then, that God has simply ignored the righteous requirements of his nature, that he has dismissed or set aside the dictates of divine justice? Certainly not.

**Romans 3: 21** - But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;  
22 Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;  
24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:  
25 Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;  
26 To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

All sin is punished, either in the person of the sinner or in the person of his/her substitute. God's retributive justice was satisfied for us in the person of Christ, who endured the full measure of punishment which the justice and righteousness of God required.

That attribute in God's character that expresses itself in retributive justice is also called *wrath*.

It is sad to find so many professing Christians who appear to regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to make an apology, or at least they wish there were no such thing. While some would not go so far as to openly admit that they consider it a blemish on the Divine character, yet they are far from regarding it with delight, they like not to think about it, and they rarely hear it mentioned without a secret resentment rising up in their hearts against it. Even with those who are more sober in their judgment, not a few seem to imagine that there is a severity about the Divine wrath which is too terrifying to form a theme for profitable contemplation. Others harbor the delusion that God's wrath is not consistent with His goodness, and so seek to banish it from their thoughts.

The doctrine or concept of *wrath* is thought by many to be beneath God. C. H. Dodd, for example, speaks for many when he says that the notion of divine wrath is *archaic* and that the biblical terminology refers to no more than "an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe." In other words, for such as Dodd, divine wrath is an impersonal force operative in a moral universe, not a personal attribute or disposition in the character of God. Wrath may well be ordained and controlled by God, but is clearly no part of him, as are love, mercy, kindness, etc.

Clearly, Dodd and others misunderstand divine wrath. It is not the loss of self-control or the irrational and capricious outburst of anger. But divine wrath is not to be thought of as a celestial bad temper or God lashing out at those who "rub Him the wrong way."

Divine wrath is *righteous antagonism toward all that is unholy. It is the revulsion of God's character to that which is a violation of God's will*. Indeed, one may speak of *divine wrath* as a function of *divine love*! For God's wrath is His love for holiness and truth and justice. It is because God passionately loves purity and peace and perfection that He reacts angrily toward anything and anyone who defiles them. Packer explains:

Would a God who took as much pleasure in evil as He did in good be a good God? Would a God who did not react adversely to evil in His world be morally perfect? Surely not. But it is precisely this adverse reaction to evil, which is a necessary part of moral perfection, that the Bible has in view when it speaks of God's wrath.

*Knowing God – J.I. Packer*

**Question # 1** - What is it that makes men hate or at least want to avoid the doctrine of the wrath of God?

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Though unchurched [baby] boomers may privately acknowledge they are flawed—and maybe even sinful—they are hardly going to sit in a public place and listen to themselves being described as worms, wretches, fallen creatures and other totally depraved types....

As a pastor to boomers, I'm convinced that they need to hear even negative messages presented in positive terms. It's the grid through which we filter things. So if we can't be positive—even when talking about negative topics—boomers will probably not listen.

We need to be very careful, therefore, about the tone we take in our services... I've made a deliberate practice of making sure that the messages I direct to my age-group always strike a positive note.

*Churches That Heal – Doug Murren*

Yes, many there are who turn away from a vision of God's wrath as though they were called to look upon some blotch in the Divine character, or some blot upon the Divine government. But what saith the Scriptures? As we turn to them we find that God has made no attempt to conceal the fact of His wrath. *He* is not ashamed to make it known that vengeance and fury belong unto Him. His own challenge is,

**Deuteronomy 32: 39 – 41** - See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand. For I lift up My hand to heaven, and say, I live forever, If I whet My glittering sword, and Mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to Mine enemies, and will reward them that hate Me

A study of the concordance will show that there are *more* references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness.

### The Vocabulary Of Wrath

**thumos** - is a word derived from *thuo* which originally meant "a violent movement of air, water, the ground, animals, or men" (TDNT, III:167). It came to signify the panting rage which wells up in a man's body and spirit. Thus *thumos* came to mean passionate anger, arising and subsiding quickly. It occurs twice in Luke, five times in Paul, once in Hebrews, and ten times in Revelation. Outside of Revelation it is used for God's wrath only once (Rom. 2:8). In Revelation it refers to God's wrath seven times, six of which have the qualifying phrase "of God" (14:10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1; 19:15).

**orge** - is a word much more suited to a description of God's wrath in the NT. It is derived from *orgao*, which speaks of "growing ripe" for something or "getting ready to bear". It thus gave *orge* the meaning of a settled disposition or emotion arising out of God's nature. It is specifically said to be "of God" in John 3:36 (on the lips of Jesus); Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; Rev. 19:15. We read of the "wrath of the Lamb" in Rev. 6:16. See also Rev. 6:17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19.

**Revelation 19: 15** - From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the **fierce wrath** of God, the Almighty.

John speaks of "the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty," where "fierce" is a translation of *thumos* and "wrath" is a translation of *orge*.

## Anger

**Numbers 32: 10** - So the LORD'S anger burned in that day, and He swore, saying, 11'None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully,

12except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the LORD fully.'

13"So the LORD'S anger burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil in the sight of the LORD was destroyed.

## Prolonged

**Psalms 90: 9** - For all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years like a sigh.

## Great

**Zechariah 7: 12** - They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts

## Willing

**Romans 9: 22** - What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

## Revealed

**Romans 1: 18** - For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

## Stored up

**Romans 2: 5** – But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

6who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:

7to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;

8but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

## Abiding

**John 3: 36** - He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

## **Accomplished**

**Revelation 6: 16** - and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;

17for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

## **God's Wrath Is Not Capricious But Directed**

Because God is holy, He hates all sin; And because He hates all sin, His anger burns against the sinner:

**Psalm 7: 11** - God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

**2 Chronicles 34: 24 - 25** - Apostasy

**Leviticus 10: 1 – 6** - Sympathy with evil

**Joshua 22: 20** - Unfaithfulness

**2 Kings 23: 26** - Provocations

**2 Chronicles 19: 2** - Fellowship with evil

**2 Chronicles 36: 16** - Mockery

**Psalm 78: 58 - 59** - Idolatry

**Ezra 10: 10 – 14** - Intermarriage

**Nehemiah 13: 18** - Profaning the Sabbath

**Psalm 78: 19 – 21** - Speaking against God

**Question # 2** - Why should the believer delight and rejoice in the wrath of God? Is there a right and wrong way to do this?

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The wrath of God is **as much a Divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power, or mercy.**

It *must be so*, for there is no blemish whatever, not the slightest defect in the character of God; yet there *would be* if "wrath" were absent from Him! Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who hates it not is a moral leper. How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His "severity" (Rom. 9:12) toward it? How could He who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, loathe and hate not that which is impure and vile? The very nature of God makes Hell as real a

necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite as Heaven is. Not only is there no imperfection in God, but there is no perfection in Him that is less perfect than another.

The wrath of God is His **eternal detestation of all unrighteousness**. It is the displeasure and indignation of Divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which He passes upon evil-doers. God is angry against sin because it is a rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God's government shall be made to know that God *is* the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded. Not that God's anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No; while God will vindicate His dominion as the Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive.

That Divine wrath *is* **one of the perfections of God** is not only evident from the considerations presented above, but is also clearly established by the express declarations of His own Word.

**Romans 1: 18** - For the wrath of God is revealed *from heaven*

It was revealed when the sentence of death was first pronounced, the earth cursed, and man driven out of the earthly paradise; and afterwards by such examples of punishment as those of the Deluge and the destruction of the Cities of the Plain by fire from heaven; but especially by the reign of death throughout the world. It was proclaimed in the curse of the law on every transgression, and was intimated in the institution of sacrifice. In the 8<sup>th</sup> of Romans, the apostle calls the attention of believers to the fact that the whole creation has become subject to vanity, and groaneth and travaileth together in pain. The same creation which declares that there is a God, and publishes His glory, also proclaims that He is the Enemy of sin and the Avenger of the crimes of men . . . But above all, the wrath of God was revealed from heaven when the Son of God came down to manifest the Divine character, and when that wrath was displayed in His sufferings and death, in a manner more awful than by all the tokens God had before given of His displeasure against sin. Besides this, the future and eternal punishment of the wicked is now declared in terms more solemn and explicit than formerly. Under the new dispensation there are two revelations given from heaven, one of wrath, the other of grace.

*Commentary On Romans - Robert Haldane*

Again; that the wrath of God is a Divine perfection is plainly demonstrated by what we read of in

**Psalms 95: 11** - Unto whom I swear in My wrath

There are two occasions of God "swearing": in making promises (Gen. 22:16), and in denouncing threatening (Deut. 1:34).

In the former, He swears in mercy to His children; in the latter, He swears to terrify the wicked. An oath is for solemn confirmation: Hebrews 6:16. In Genesis 22:16 God said, "By

*Myself* have I sworn." In Psalm 89:35 He declares, "Once have I sworn *by My holiness*." While in Psalm 95:11 He affirmed, "I swear in *My wrath*." Thus the great Jehovah Himself appeals to His "wrath" as a perfection equal to His "holiness": He swares by the one as much as by the other! Again; as in Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), and as all the Divine perfections are illustriously displayed by Him (John 1:18), therefore do we read of "the *wrath* of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16).

### **God's Wrath Is Plainly Displayed In His Word**

**Question # 3** - Describe the two greatest displays of wrath portrayed in Scripture you can think of. What is your response to these?

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- Egypt's destruction Ex. 15:4, 7
- Great plague Num. 11:33
- Israel's wanderings Num. 32:10–13
- Withholding of rain Deut. 11:17
- Destruction of a people 1 Sam 28:18
- Trouble Ps. 90:7
- Man's death Ps. 90:9
- Jerusalem's destruction Luke 21:23, 24
- Punishments of hell Rev. 14:10
- Final judgments Rev. 19:15
- Israel's captivity 2 Chr. 36:16, 17

The wrath of God is **a perfection of the Divine character upon which we need to frequently meditate.**

First, that **our hearts may be duly impressed by God's detestation of sin.** We are ever prone to regard sin lightly, to gloss over its hideousness, to make excuses for it. But the more we study and ponder God's abhorrence of sin and His frightful vengeance upon it, the more likely are we to realize its heinousness.

Second, to **beget a true fear in our souls for God:**

**Hebrews 12: 28 – 29** - Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire

We cannot serve Him "acceptably" unless there is due "reverence" for His awful Majesty and "godly fear" of His righteous anger, and these are best promoted by frequently calling to mind that "our God is a consuming fire."

Third, **to draw out our souls in fervent praise for having delivered us from the wrath to come** (1 Thess. 1:10).

Our readiness or our reluctance to *meditate* upon the wrath of God becomes a sure test of how our hearts' really stand affected toward Him. If we do not truly rejoice in God, for what He is in Himself, and that because of *all* the perfections which are eternally resident in Him, then how dwelleth *the love of God* in us? Each of us needs to be most prayerfully on his guard against devising an image of God in our thoughts which is patterned after our own evil inclinations. Of old the Lord complained, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as *thyself*" (Ps. 50:21), If we rejoice not "at the remembrance of His *holiness*" (Ps. 97:12),



if we rejoice not to know that in a soon coming Day God will make a most glorious display of His *wrath*, by taking vengeance on all who now oppose Him, it is proof positive that our hearts are not in subjection to Him, that we are yet in our sins, on the way to the everlasting burnings.

**Deuteronomy 32: 43** - *Rejoice*, O ye nations (Gentiles) His people, *for* He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries

And again we read,

**Revelation 19:13** - I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God; *For* true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. And again they said Alleluia

Great will be the rejoicing of the saints in that day when the Lord shall vindicate His majesty, exercise His awful dominion, magnify His justice, and overthrow the proud rebels who have dared to defy Him.

**Psalms 130: 3** - If thou Lord, shouldest mark (impute) iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

Well may each of us ask this question, for it is written,

**Psalms 1: 5** - The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment

### God's Wrath Is Restrained

There are over 600 laws, rules and regulations given in the Old Testament. In the Mosaic code, people could be executed for adultery, blasphemy, incorrigible juvenile delinquency, breaking the Sabbath, homosexuality, rape, just a few of the 15-20 crimes for which one would suffer loss of life. But contrary to widespread perception, ***the Mosaic Law actually represents a massive reduction in capital offenses from the original list.*** As R. C. Sproul puts it,

The OT code represents a bending over backwards of divine patience and forbearance. The OT law is one of astonishing grace

*The Holiness of God – R.C. Sproul*

The original law of the universe is that "the soul that sins, it shall die." Life is a divine gift, not a debt. Sin brings the loss of the gift of life. Once a person sins he forfeits any claim on God to human existence. The fact that we continue to exist after sinning is owing wholly to divine mercy and gracious longsuffering.

### The Reality Of God's Wrath Revealed In The Cross

How sorely was *Christ's* soul exercised with thoughts of God's marking the iniquities of His people when they were upon Him! He was "amazed and very heavy" (Mark 14:33). His awful agony, His bloody sweat, His strong cries and supplications (Heb. 5:7), His reiterated prayers ("If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me"), His last dreadful cry, ("My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?") all manifest what fearful apprehensions He had of *what* it was for God to "mark iniquities." Well may poor sinners cry out, "Lord *who*

shall stand" when the Son of God Himself so trembled beneath the weight of His wrath? If thou, my reader, hast not "fled for refuge" to Christ, the only Saviour, "how wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan?" (Jer. 12:5)?

Unless we give a real content to the wrath of God, unless we hold that men really deserve to have God visit upon them the painful consequences of their wrongdoing, we empty God's forgiveness of its meaning. For if there is no ill desert, God ought to overlook sin. We can think of forgiveness as something real only when we hold that sin has betrayed us into a situation where we deserve to have God inflict upon us the most serious consequences, and that is upon such a situation that God's grace supervenes. When the logic of the situation demands that He should take action against the sinner, and He yet takes action for him, then and then alone can we speak of grace. But there is no room for grace if there is no suggestion of dire consequences merited by sin.

*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross – Leon Morris*

**Question # 4** - Do you view sin as God does? How can we grow to view our sin more accurately?

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### **God's Wrath Is Not Easily Provoked**

**Numbers 14: 18** – The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.

**Proverbs 12: 16** – A fool's anger is known at once, But a prudent man conceals dishonor.

**1 Corinthians 13: 4** - Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant

When I consider how the goodness of God is abused by the greatest part of mankind, I cannot but be of his mind that said,

The greatest miracle in the world is God's patience and bounty to an ungrateful world. If a prince hath an enemy got into one of his towns, he doth not send them in provision, but lays close siege to the place, and doth what he can to starve them. But the great God, that could wink all His enemies into destruction, bears with them, and is at daily cost to maintain them. Well may He command us to bless them that curse us, who Himself does good to the evil and unthankful. But think not, sinners, that you shall escape thus; God's mill goes slow, but grinds small; the more admirable His patience and bounty now is, the more dreadful and unsupportable will that fury be which ariseth out of His abused goodness. Nothing smoother than the sea, yet when stirred into a tempest, nothing rageth more. Nothing so

sweet as the patience and goodness of God, and nothing so terrible as His wrath when it takes fire.

*William Gurnall*

### **God Does Not Take Pleasure In The Death Of The Wicked**

**Isaiah 27: 4 – 5** - Fury is not in me: who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me

**Ezekiel 33: 11** - Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel

**Ezekiel 18: 32** - For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live."

"...the greatest judgment God lays upon a man in this life is to let him sin without control. When the Lord's displeasure is most severely kindled against a person, he does not say, I will bring the sword and the plague on this man, but, I will let him sin on: 'So I gave them up unto their own hearts 'lust' (Ps. 81.12)."

*Doctrine of Repentance - Thomas Watson*

"Presume not upon God's patience. The exercise of it is not eternal; you are at present under His patience, yet while you are unconverted you are also under His anger: (Psa 7:11) "God is angry with the wicked every day." You know not how soon His anger may turn His patience aside, and step before it. It may be His sword is drawn out of the scabbard, His arrows may be settled in His bow, and perhaps there is but a little time before you may feel the edge of the one or the point of the other, and then there will be no more time for patience in God to us, or petition from us to Him..."

*The Existence and Attributes of God - Stephen Charnock*

"It is a horrible thing for a man to be so doctrinal that he can speak coolly of the doom of the wicked, so that, if he does not actually praise God for it, it costs him no anguish of heart to think of the ruin of millions of our race. This is horrible! I hate to hear the terrors of the Lord proclaimed by men whose hard visages, harsh tones, and unfeeling spirit betray a sort of doctrinal desiccation: all the milk of human kindness is dried out of them. Having no feeling himself, such a preacher creates none, and the people sit and listen while he keeps to dry, lifeless statements, until they come to value him for being "sound," and they themselves come to be sound, too: and I need not add, sound asleep also, or what life they have is spent in sniffing out heresy and making earnest men offenders for a word. Into this spirit may we never be baptized!"

*C. H. Spurgeon*

Then flee, my reader, flee to Christ; "flee *from* the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7) ere it be too late. Do not, we earnestly beseech you, suppose that this message is intended for somebody else. It is *to you*! Do not be contented by *thinking* you *have* already fled to Christ. Make *certain*! Beg the Lord to search your heart and show you yourself.

**Question # 5** - As you reflect on the fury of God's righteous wrath against sin how is your view of Christ and His work affected?

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### *A Word to Preachers*

Brethren, do we in our oral ministry, preach on this solemn subject as much as we ought? The Old Testament prophets frequently told their hearers that their wicked lives provoked the Holy One of Israel, and that they were treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath. And conditions in the world are no better now than they were then! Nothing is so calculated to arouse the careless and cause carnal professors to search their hearts, as to enlarge upon the fact that "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). The forerunner of Christ warned his hearers to "flee from the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7). The Saviour bade His auditors "Fear Him, which after He hath killed, hath power to cast into Hell; yea, I say unto you. Fear Him" (Luke 12:5). The apostle Paul said, "Knowing therefore the *terror* of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). Faithfulness demands that we speak as plainly about Hell as about Heaven.

### **PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK**

#### **Read Chapter 12 – The Patience Of God And Chapter 13 – The Grace Of God**

**Question # 1** - Do you agree with the author's statement, "the glory of this grace itself shines forth on almost every page of Scripture"? Give some examples that support your answer.

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**Question # 2** - Is the definition of God's patience in this chapter new to you? How does it adjust your view of God?

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**Question # 3** - How do we tend to interpret God's patience? Why do we so often take it for granted?

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**Question # 4** - How does understanding God's holiness and justice serve to highlight the reality of His patience?

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**Question # 5** - How does the work of Christ serve as a foundation and reason for God's patience (see Romans 3:25-26, Romans 9:22-26, and 2 Peter 3:8-10)?

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**Question # 6** - In your own words define and summarize God's grace

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**Question # 7** - How free is grace? Why do we tend to resist its freeness?

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**Question # 8** - How does your life story add another account to the long line of surprising recipients of God's grace?

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**Question # 9** - What aspect of God's grace is new to you or most astounding? Explain.

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**Question # 10** - What is your response to the grace God has so richly poured out in your life? How does it affect your response to God and your interaction with others?

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# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 11 – 13 February 2011

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## THE PATIENCE OF GOD

A proud atheist once stood with a group of people, shook his fist toward the sky and said, "If there is a God, may he prove himself by striking me dead right now." After a long pause in which nothing happened, the atheist smiled and said, "You see, I've proved there is no God." One man in the crowd responded, "All you have proved is that God is longsuffering to put up with such arrogance and unbelief in such puny creatures as we are."

Far less has been written upon this than the other excellencies of the Divine character. Not a few of those who have expatiated at length upon the Divine attributes have passed over the patience of God without any comment. It is not easy to suggest a reason for this, for surely the longsuffering of God is as much one of the Divine perfections as His wisdom, power, or holiness, and as much to be admired and revered by us. True, the actual term will not be found in a concordance so frequently as the others, but the glory of this grace itself shines forth on almost every page of Scripture. Certain it is that we lose much if we do not frequently meditate upon the patience of God and earnestly pray that our hearts and ways may be more completely conformed thereto.

**Question # 1** - Do you agree with the author's statement, "the glory of this grace itself shines forth on almost every page of Scripture"? Give some examples that support your answer.

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Most probably the principal reason why so many writers have failed to give us anything, separately, upon the patience of God was because of the difficulty of distinguishing this attribute from the Divine goodness and mercy, particularly the latter. God's longsuffering is mentioned in conjunction with His grace and mercy again and again, as may be seen by consulting

**Exodus 34: 6** - And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth

That the *patience* of God is really a display of His *mercy*, in fact is one way in which it is frequently manifested, cannot be gainsaid; but that they are one and the same excellency, and are not to be separated, we cannot concede. It may not be easy to discriminate between them, nevertheless, Scripture fully warrants us, in predicating some things of the one which we cannot of the other.

Stephen Charnock, the Puritan, defines God's patience, in part, thus:

It is a part of the Divine goodness and mercy, yet differs from both. God being the greatest goodness, hath the greatest mildness; mildness is always the companion of true goodness, and the greater the goodness, the greater the mildness. Who

so holy as Christ, and who so meek? God's slowness to anger is a branch of His mercy: "the Lord is full of compassion, slow to anger" (Ps. 145:8). It differs from mercy in the formal consideration of the subject: mercy respects the creature as miserable, patience respects the creature as criminal; mercy pities him in his misery, patience bears with the sin which engendered the misery, and giving birth to more.

*Stephen Charnock*

Personally we would define the Divine patience as that power of control which God exercises over Himself, causing Him to bear with the wicked and forebear so long in punishing them.

**Nahum 1: 3** - The Lord is slow to anger and great in power

Men that are great in the world are quick in passion, and are not so ready to forgive an injury, or bear with an offender, as one of a meaner rank. It is a want of power over that man's self that makes him do unbecoming things upon a provocation. A prince that can bridle his passions is a king over himself as well as over his subjects. God is slow to anger *because* great in power. He has no less power over Himself than over His creatures.

It is at the above point, we think, that God's patience is most clearly distinguished from His mercy. Though the creature is benefited thereby, the patience of God chiefly respects Himself, a restraint placed upon His acts by His will; whereas His mercy terminates wholly upon the creature. The patience of God is that excellency which causes Him to sustain great injuries without immediately avenging Himself. He has a power of patience as well as a power of justice. Thus the Hebrew word for the Divine longsuffering is rendered "slow to anger" in Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 103:8, etc. Not that there are any passions in the Divine nature, but that God's wisdom and will is pleased to act with that stateliness and sobriety which becometh His exalted majesty.

*Stephen Charnock*

In support of our definition above let us point out that it was to this excellency in the Divine character that Moses appealed, when Israel sinned so grievously at Kadesh-Barnea, and there provoked Jehovah so sorely. Unto His servant the Lord said, I will smite them with the pestilence and disinherit them. Then it was that the typical mediator pleaded:

**Numbers 14: 17 - 18** - And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The LORD *is* longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation*

Thus, His longsuffering is His "power" of self-restraint.

**Question # 2** - Is the definition of God's patience in this chapter new to you? How does it adjust your view of God?

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**Romans 9: 22** - What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much *longsuffering* the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction

Were God to immediately break these reprobate vessels into pieces, His power of self-control would not so eminently appear; by bearing with their wickedness and forbearing punishment so long, the power of His patience is gloriously demonstrated. True, the wicked interpret His longsuffering quite differently

**Ecclesiastes 8: 11** - Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil

The anointed eye adores what they abuse.

**Question # 3** - How do we tend to interpret God's patience? Why do we so often take it for granted?

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"The God of patience" (Rom. 15:5) is one of the Divine titles. The Triune God is involved:

**Romans 15: 5** - Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus

**Hebrews 12: 2** - Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

**Galatians 5: 22** - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith

What a patience that was which Jesus exhibited for us in our redemption! To come from Heaven to earth, to dwell in poverty and neglect and find no room even in the inn! Admire the patience of Bethlehem. To hold His tongue for thirty years—who shall estimate the wonderful patience of Nazareth and the carpenter's shop! When He spoke, to be despised and rejected of men. What patience for Him whom Cherubim obey! Oh, the patience of the Christ to be tempted of the devil! One can hardly tell what patience Christ must have had to let the devil come within ten thousand miles of him, for He was able to keep him far down in the abyss below His feet.

*The Love Of God & The Patience Of Christ – C. H. Spurgeon*

Deity is thus denominated:

- God Is Both The Author And Object Of The Grace Of Patience In The Saint.
- This Is What He Is In Himself: Patience Is One Of His Perfections.



- As A Pattern For Us

**Colossians 3: 12** - Put on therefore, as the *elect of God*, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, *longsuffering*

**Ephesians 5: 2** - Be ye therefore followers (emulators) of god, as dear children

When tempted to be disgusted at the dullness of another, or to be revenged on one who has wronged you, call to remembrance God's infinite patience and longsuffering with yourself.

The patience of God is *manifested* in His dealings with sinners. How strikingly was it displayed toward the antediluvians. When mankind was universally degenerate, and all flesh had corrupted his way, God did not destroy them till He had forewarned them.

**Gen 6:3** And the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

**1 Pet 3:20** who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

He "waited" (1 Pet. 3:20), probably no less than one hundred and twenty years (Gen. 6:3), during which time Noah was a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). So, later, when the Gentiles not only worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, but also committed the vilest abominations contrary to even the dictates of nature (Rom. 1:19-26), and hereby filled up the measure of their iniquity; yet, instead of drawing His sword for the extermination of such rebels, God "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways," and gave them "rain from heaven and fruitful seasons"(Acts 14:16, 17).

Marvelously was God's patience exercised and manifested toward *Israel*. First, He "suffered their manners" for forty years in the wilderness (Acts 13:18). Later, when they had entered Canaan, but followed the evil customs of the nations around them, and turned to idolatry; though God chastened them sorely, He did not utterly destroy them, but in their distress, raised up deliverers for them. When their iniquity was raised to such a height that none but a God of infinite patience, could have borne them, He, notwithstanding, spared them many years before He allowed them to be carried down into Babylon. Finally, when their rebellion against Him reached its climax by crucifying His Son. He waited forty years ere He sent the Romans against them, and that only after they had judged themselves "unworthy of eternal life" (Acts 13:46).

How wondrous is God's patience with the world today. On every side people are sinning with a high hand. The Divine law is trampled under foot and God Himself openly despised. It is truly amazing that He does not instantly strike dead those who so brazenly defy Him. Why does He not suddenly cut off the haughty, infidel and blatant blasphemer, as He did Ananias and Sapphira? Why does He not cause the earth to open its mouth and devour the persecutors of his people, so that, like Dathan and Abiram, they shall go down alive into the Pit? And what of apostate Christendom, where every possible form of sin is now tolerated and practiced under cover of the holy name of Christ? Why does not the righteous wrath of Heaven make an end of such abominations? Only one answer is possible: because God bears with "*much* longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

**Hosea 11: 9** - I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man

**Question # 4** - How does understanding God's holiness and justice serve to highlight the reality of His patience?

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And what of the writer and the reader? Let us review our own lives. It is not long since we followed a multitude to do evil, had no concern for God's glory, and lived only to gratify self. How patiently He bore with our vile conduct! And now that grace has snatched us as brands from the burning, giving us a place in God's family, and begotten us unto an eternal inheritance in glory; how miserably we requite Him. How shallow our gratitude, how tardy our obedience, how frequent our backslidings! One reason why God suffers the flesh to remain in the believer is that He may exhibit His longsuffering

**2 Peter 3: 9** - The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Since this Divine attribute is manifested only in this world, God takes advantage to display it toward His own.

Oh! the tenderness, the graciousness of the Lord's patience with His people! How patiently he hears with their ungrateful repinings, with their secret rebellion, with their cold love, with their cruel unbelief, with their continuous and aggravated backslidings! Truly, the patience of God, after grace, is greater than His patience before grace. How should this thought humble us in the dust! How should it subdue our rebellious spirit, break our hard heart, and lead us, in every fresh remembrance, to the blood of Christ, to wash in the fountain open for sin and uncleanness!

*Octavious Winslow*

May our meditation upon this Divine excellency soften our hearts, make our consciences tender, and may we learn in the school of holy experience the "patience of saints," namely, submission to the Divine will and continuance in well doing.

One of the reasons that His patience puzzles us is that we have not much longsuffering ourselves. We think that we do well to be angry with the rebellious, and so we prove ourselves to be more like Jonah than Jesus. A few have learned to be patient and pitiful to the ungodly, but many more are of the mind of James and John, who would have called fire from heaven upon those who rejected the Savior. We are in such a hurry. We have not the eternal leisure of God. We have but to live, like ephemera, our little day, and therefore we are in hot haste to see all things accomplished ere the sun goes down. We are but leaves in the forest of existence; and if something is not done soon, and done quickly, we shall fade, and pass away amid unaccomplished hope; and so we are not patient. We are

staggered when the Master tells us to forgive unto seventy times seven. When he forgives unto seventy times seven, and still waits, and still holds back his thunders, we are amazed, because our mind is not in harmony with the mind of the Infinitely-patient God.

*God's Longsuffering - Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

Let us earnestly seek grace to emulate this Divine excellency. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48): in the immediate context Christ exhorts us to love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us. God bears long with the wicked notwithstanding the multitude of their sin, and shall we desire to be revenged because of a single injury?

**Question # 5** - How does the work of Christ serve as a foundation and reason for God's patience (see Romans 3:25-26, Romans 9:22-26, and 2 Peter 3:8-10)?

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**Romans 3: 25 – 26** - Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

**Romans 9: 22** - *What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:  
<sup>23</sup> And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, <sup>24</sup> Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?  
<sup>25</sup> As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.  
<sup>26</sup> And it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, *Ye are* not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God

**2 Peter 3: 8** - But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.  
<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

### **Patience**

*Lyrics - Charles Wesley; Tune – Augustus Toplady*

Lord, and am I yet alive,  
Not in torment, not in hell?  
Still does Your good Spirit strive  
With the chief of sinners dwell?

Tell it unto sinners, tell,  
I am, I am out of hell!

Yes, I still lift up my eyes,  
Will not of Your love despair,  
Still in spite of sin I rise,  
Still I bow to You in prayer.

Tell it unto sinners, tell,  
I am, I am out of hell!

Oh, the length and breadth of love!  
Jesus, Savior, can it be?  
All Your mercy's height I prove,  
All the depth is seen in me.

Tell it unto sinners, tell,  
I am, I am out of hell!

See a bush that burns with fire,  
Unconsumed amid the flame!  
Turn aside the sight admire,  
I the living wonder am.

Tell it unto sinners, tell,  
I am, I am out of hell!

See a stone that hangs in air,  
See a spark in ocean live!  
Kept alive with death so near,  
I to God the glory give.

Ever tell- to sinners tell,  
I am, I am out of hell!"

## THE GRACE OF GOD

At the heart of the Reformation was one of the most fundamental questions of the Christian faith: How can I be saved from eternal damnation? The answer of all the leading Reformers was one and the same: only by God's free and sovereign grace. It is wrong to suppose that the doctrine of Justification by faith alone, that storm center of the Reformation, was the crucial question in the minds of such theologians as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and John Calvin. This doctrine was important to the Reformers because it helped to express and to safeguard their answer to another, more vital, question, namely, whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace, not only justifying them for Christ's sake when they come to faith, but also raising them from the death of sin by His quickening Spirit in order to bring them to faith.

*Michael A.G. Haykin*

Grace is a perfection of the Divine character which is exercised only toward the elect. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New is the grace of God ever mentioned in connection with mankind generally, still less with the lower orders of His creatures. In this it is distinguished from mercy, for the mercy of God is "over all His works" (Ps. 145-9).

Grace is the alone source from which flows the goodwill, love, and salvation of God unto His chosen people. This attribute of the Divine character was defined by

Grace is the eternal and absolute free favour of God,  
manifested in the vouchsafement of spiritual and eternal  
blessings to the guilty and the unworthy.

*The Reign of Grace - Abraham Booth*

Divine grace is the sovereign and saving favour of God exercised in the bestowment of blessings upon those who have no merit in them and for which no compensation is demanded *from* them. Nay, more; it is the favour of God shown to those who not only have no positive deserts of their own, but who are thoroughly ill-deserving and hell-deserving. It is completely unmerited and unsought, and is altogether unattracted by anything in or from or by the objects upon which it is bestowed. Grace can neither be bought, earned, nor won by the creature. If it could be, it would cease to be grace. When a thing is said to be of grace we mean that the recipient has no claim upon it, that it was in nowise due him. It comes to him as pure charity, and, at first, unasked and undesired.

*The Attributes Of God – A.W. Pink*

The fullest exposition of the amazing grace of God is to be found in the Epistles of the apostle Paul. In his writings "grace" stands in direct opposition to works and worthiness, *all* works and worthiness, of whatever kind or degree. This is abundantly clear from

**Romans 11: 6** - And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. If it be of works, then is it no more grace, otherwise work is no more work.

Grace and works will no more unite than an acid and an alkali.

**Ephesians 2: 8 – 9** - By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast

The absolute favour of God can no more consist with human merit than oil and water will fuse into one.

**Romans 4: 4 - 5** - Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

**Question # 6** - In your own words define and summarize God's grace

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There are three principal characteristics of Divine grace.

- First, it is **eternal**. Grace was planned before it was exercised, purposed before it was imparted: "Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus *before* the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9).
- Second, it is **free**, for none did ever purchase it: "Being justified freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24).
- Third, it is **sovereign**, because God exercises it toward and bestows it upon whom He pleases:

**Romans 5: 21** - Even so might grace *reign*

If grace "reigns" then is it on the throne, and the occupant of the throne is sovereign. Hence "the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16).

Just because grace *is* **unmerited** favour, it must be exercised in a *sovereign* manner. Therefore does the Lord declare,

**Exodus 33: 19** - I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious

Were God to show grace to all of Adam's descendants, men would at once conclude that He was righteously compelled to take them to heaven as a meet compensation for allowing the human race to fall into sin. But the great God is under no obligation to any of His creatures, least of all to those who are rebels against Him.

Eternal life is a *gift*, therefore it can neither be earned by good works, nor claimed as a right. Seeing that salvation is a "gift," who has any right to tell God on whom He ought to bestow it? It is not that the Giver ever *refuses* this gift to any who seek it wholeheartedly, and according to the rules which He has prescribed. No! He refuses none who come to Him empty-handed and in the way of His appointing. But if out of a world of impenitent and unbelieving, God is determined to exercise His sovereign right by choosing a limited number to be saved, who is wronged? Is God *obliged* to force His gift on those who value it not? Is God compelled to save those who are determined to go *their own way*?

But nothing more riles the natural man and brings to the surface his innate and inveterate enmity against God than to press upon him the eternality, the freeness, and the absolute sovereignty of Divine grace. That God should have formed His purpose from everlasting without in anywise consulting the creature, is too abasing for the unbroken heart. That grace cannot be earned or won by any efforts of man is too self-emptying for self-righteousness. And that grace singles out whom it pleases to be its favored objects, arouses hot protests from haughty rebels. The clay rises up against the Potter and asks, "Why hast Thou made me thus?" A lawless insurrectionist dares to call into question the justice of Divine sovereignty.

**Question # 7** - How free is grace? Why do we tend to resist its freeness?

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The distinguishing grace of God is seen in saving that people whom He has sovereignly singled out to be His high favorites. By "distinguishing" we mean that grace discriminates, makes differences" chooses some and passes by others. It was distinguishing grace which selected Abraham from the midst of his idolatrous neighbors and made him "the friend of God." It was distinguishing grace which saved "publicans and sinners," but said of the religious Pharisees, "Let them alone" (Matt. 15:14). Nowhere does the glory of God's free and sovereign grace shine more conspicuously than in the unworthiness and unlikeness of its objects. Beautifully was this illustrated by James Hervey, (1751):

Where sin has abounded, says the proclamation from the court of heaven, grace doth much more abound. *Manasseh* was a monster of barbarity, for he caused his own children to pass through the fire, and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. *Manasseh* was an adept in iniquity, for he not only multiplied, and to an extravagant degree, his own sacrilegious impieties, but he poisoned the principles and perverted the manners of his subjects, making them do worse than the most detestable of the heathen idolators: see 2 Chronicles 33. Yet, through this superabundant grace he is humbled, he is reformed, and becomes a child of forgiving love, an heir of immortal glory.

*James Hervey*

Behold that bitter and bloody persecutor, Saul; when, breathing out threatenings and bent upon slaughter, he worried the lambs and put to death the disciples of Jesus. The havoc he had committed, the inoffensive families he had already ruined, were not sufficient to assuage his vengeful spirit. They were only a taste, which, instead of glutting the bloodhound, made him more closely pursue the track, and more eagerly pant for destruction. He still has a thirst for violence and murder. So eager and insatiable is his thirst, that he even *breathes out* threatening and slaughter (Acts 9:1). His words are spears and arrows, and his tongue a sharp sword. 'Tis as natural for him to menace the Christians as to breathe the air. Nay, they bled every hour in the purposes of his rancorous heart. It is only owing to want of power that every syllable he utters, every breath he draws, does not deal out deaths, and cause some of the innocent disciples to fall. Who, upon the principles of human judgment, would not have pronounced *him* a vessel of wrath, destined to unavoidable damnation? Nay, would not have been ready to conclude that, if there were heavier chains and a deeper dungeon in the world of woe, they must surely be reserved for such an implacable enemy of true godliness? Yet, admire and adore the inexhaustible treasures of grace—this Saul is admitted into the goodly fellowship of the prophets, is numbered with the noble arm of martyrs and makes a distinguished figure among the glorious company of the apostles.

The *Corinthians* were flagitious even to a proverb. Some of them wallowing in such abominable vices, and habituated themselves to such outrageous acts of injustice, as were a reproach to human nature. Yet, even these sons of violence and slaves of sensuality were washed, sanctified, justified

**1 Corinthians 6: 9 – 11** - Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

"Washed," in the precious blood of a dying Redeemer; "sanctified," by the powerful operations of the blessed Spirit; "justified," through the infinitely tender mercies of a gracious God. Those who were once the burden of the earth, are now the joy of heaven, the delight of angels.

**Question # 8** - How does your life story add another account to the long line of surprising recipients of God's grace?

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Now the grace of God is manifested in and by and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

**John 1: 17** - The law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ

This does not mean that God never exercised grace toward any before His Son became incarnate—Genesis 6:8, Exodus 33:19, etc., clearly show otherwise. But grace and truth were fully revealed and perfectly exemplified when the Redeemer came to this earth, and died for His people upon the cross. It is through Christ the Mediator alone that the grace of God flows to His elect.

**Romans 5: 15, 17, 21** - Much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is *by* one man, Jesus Christ. . .much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life *by* one, Jesus Christ. . .so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord

The grace of God is *proclaimed* in the Gospel (Acts 20:24), which is to the self-righteous Jew a "stumbling block," and to the conceited and philosophizing Greek "foolishness." And why so? Because there is nothing whatever in it that is adapted to gratify the pride of man. It announces that unless we are saved by grace, we cannot be saved at all. It declares that apart from Christ, the unspeakable Gift of God's grace, the state of every man is desperate, irremediable, hopeless. The Gospel addresses men as guilty, condemned, perishing criminals. It declares that the chastest moralist is in the same terrible plight as is the most voluptuous profligate; that the zealous professor, with all his religious performances, is no better off than the most profane infidel.

**Question # 9** - What aspect of God's grace is new to you or most astounding? Explain.

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The Gospel contemplates every descendant of Adam as a fallen, polluted, hell-deserving and helpless sinner. The grace which the Gospel publishes is his only hope. All stand before God convicted as transgressors of His holy law, as guilty and condemned criminals; awaiting not sentence, but the execution of sentence already passed on them (John 3:18; Rom. 3:19). To complain against the partiality of grace is suicidal. If the sinner insists upon bare justice, then the Lake of Fire must be his eternal portion. His only hope lies in bowing to the sentence which Divine justice has passed upon him, owning the absolute righteousness of it, casting himself on the mercy of God, and stretching forth empty hands to avail himself of the grace of God now made known to him in the Gospel.

The third Person in the Godhead is the *Communicator* of grace, therefore is He denominated "the Spirit of grace" (Zech. 12:10). God the Father is the Fountain of all



grace, for He purposed in Himself the everlasting covenant of redemption. God the Son is the only Channel of grace. The Gospel is the Publisher of grace. The Spirit is the Bestower. He is the One who applies the Gospel in saving power to the soul: quickening the elect while spiritually dead, conquering their rebellious wills, melting their hard hearts, opening their blind eyes, cleansing them from the leprosy of sin. Thus we may say with the late G. S. Bishop,

Grace is a provision for men who are so fallen that they cannot lift the axe of justice, so corrupt that they cannot change their own natures, so averse to God that they cannot turn to Him, so blind that they cannot see Him, so deaf that they cannot hear Him, and so dead that He Himself must open their graves and lift them into resurrection.

*G.S. Bishop*

**Question # 10** - What is your response to the grace God has so richly poured out in your life? How does it affect your response to God and your interaction with others?

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### Grace

God is the God of all. 1 Pet 5:10.

God is the Giver of. Ps 84:11; James 1:17.

God's throne, the throne of. Heb 4:16.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of. Zech 12:10; Heb 10:29.

Was upon Christ. Luke 2:40; John 3:24.

Christ spoke with. Ps 45:2; Luke 4:22.

Christ was full of. John 1:14.

Came by Christ. John 1:17; Rom 5:15.

Given by Christ. 1 Cor 1:4.

Foretold by the prophets. 1 Pet 1:10.

Riches of, exhibited in God's kindness through Christ. Eph 2:7.

Glory of, exhibited in our acceptance in Christ. Eph 1:6.

Is described as

- Great. Acts 4:33.
- Sovereign. Rom 5:21.
- Rich. Eph 1:7; 2:7.
- Exceeding. 2 Cor 9:14.
- Manifold. 1 Pet 4:10.
- All-sufficient. 2 Cor 12:9.
- All-abundant. Rom 5:15,17,20.
- Glorious. Eph 1:6.

The gospel, a declaration of. Acts 20:24,32.

Is the source of

- Election. Rom 11:5.
- The call of God. Gal 1:15.
- Justification. Rom 3:24; Titus 3:7.
- Faith. Acts 18:27.
- Forgiveness of sins. Eph 1:7.
- Salvation. Acts 15:11; Eph 2:5,8.
- Consolation. 2 Thess 2:16.
- Hope. 2 Thess 2:16.

Necessary to the service of God. Heb 12:28.

God's work completed in saints by. 2 Thess 1:11,12.

The success and completion of the work of God to be attributed to. Zech 4:7.

Inheritance of the promises by. Rom 4:16.

Justification by, opposed to that by works. Rom 4:4,5; 11:6; Gal 5:4.

Saints

- Are heirs of. 1 Pet 3:7.
- Are under. Rom 6:14.
- Receive, from Christ. John 1:16.
- Are what they are by. 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 1:12.
- Abound in gifts of. Acts 4:33; 2 Cor 8:1; 9:8,14.
- Should be established in. Heb 13:9.
- Should be strong in. 2 Tim 2:1.
- Should grow in. 2 Pet 3:18.
- Should speak with. Eph 4:29; Col 4:6.

Specially given

- To ministers. Rom 12:3,6; 15:15; 1 Cor 3:10; Gal 2:9; Eph 3:7.
- To the humble. Prov 3:34; James 4:6.
- To those who walk uprightly. Ps 84:11.

Not to be received in vain. 2 Cor 6:1.

Pray for

- For yourselves. Heb 4:16.
- For others. 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 6:24.

Beware lest you fail of. Heb 12:15.

Manifestation of, in others, a cause of gladness. Acts 11:23; 1 John 1:3,4.

Special manifestation of, at the second coming of Christ. 1 Pet 1:13.

Not to be abused. Rom 3:8; 6:1,15.

Antinomians abused. Jude 1:4.

*Source: The MacArthur Study Bible*

## **PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK**

### **Read Chapter 14 – The Mercy Of God And Chapter 15 – The Love Of God**

**Question # 1** - What is the difference between grace and mercy according to the author?

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**Question # 2** - How deep is our misery? How serious is our sin problem? How does considering this magnify God's mercy?

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**Question # 3** - List out some of God's mercies on all men in general. What would be an appropriate response to these mercies?

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**Question # 4** - Describe how God's mercy towards sinners in general might serve as a connection or point of communication in sharing the gospel with an unbeliever.

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**Question # 5** - Does beholding God's mercy stir in you a deeper desire to know and enjoy God? How does this make Christ's work more precious and heaven more appealing?

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**Question # 6** - In what ways are conceptions of God's love in our day off-balance or erroneous?

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**Question # 7** - Does the fact that God's love is uninfluenced make it seem less personal? Is this impression accurate? Explain.

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**Question # 8** - Describe the nature, extent, and quality of God's love. What about it is most astounding to you?

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**Question # 9** - Why is it important to affirm that God loved us first? What would be the problem if we affirmed the opposite?

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**Question # 10** - How does the love of God provide comfort and strength in the midst of trials and difficulties? Give an example of how this might work practically?

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# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 12 – 20 February 2011

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## THE MERCY OF GOD

**Psalm 136: 1** - O give thanks unto the Lord: for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever

For this perfection of the Divine character God is greatly to be praised. Three times over in as many verses does the Psalmist here call upon the saints to give thanks unto the Lord for this adorable attribute. And surely this is the least that can be asked for from those who have been such bounteous gainers by it. When we contemplate the characteristics of this Divine excellency, we cannot do otherwise than bless God for it. His mercy is "great" (1 Kings 3:6), "plenteous" (Ps. 86:5), "tender" (Luke 1:78), "abundant" (1 Pet. 1:3); it is "from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:17). Well may we say with the Psalmist, "I will sing aloud of Thy mercy" (59:16).

**Exodus 33: 19** - I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy

Wherein differs the "mercy of God from His grace"? The mercy of God has its spring in the Divine goodness.

- The first issue of God's goodness is His benignity or bounty, by which He gives liberally to His creatures as creatures; thus has He given being and life to all things.
- The second issue of God's goodness is His mercy, which denotes the ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of fallen creatures. Thus, "mercy" presupposes *sin*.

Though it may not be easy at the first consideration to perceive a real difference between the grace and the mercy of God, it helps us thereto if we carefully ponder His dealings with the unfallen angels. He has never exercised mercy toward them, for they have never stood in any need thereof, not having sinned or come beneath the effects of the curse. Yet, they certainly are the objects of God's free and sovereign grace.

1. **First, because of His *election* of them from out of the whole angelic race** (1 Tim. 5:21).
2. **Second, and in consequence of their election, because of His *preservation* of them** from apostasy, when Satan rebelled and dragged down with him one-third of the celestial hosts (Rev. 12:4).
3. **Third, in making Christ their *Head*** (Col. 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:22), whereby they are eternally secured in the holy condition in which they were created.
4. **Fourth, because of the exalted position which has been assigned them:** to live in God's immediate presence (Dan. 7:10), to serve Him constantly in His heavenly temple, to receive honorable commissions from Him (Heb. 1:14). This is abundant *grace* toward them but "mercy" it is not.

**Question # 1** - What is the difference between grace and mercy according to the author?

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**Question # 2** - How deep is our misery? How serious is our sin problem? How does considering this magnify God's mercy?

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In endeavoring to study the mercy of God as it is set forth in Scripture, a threefold distinction needs to be made, if the Word of Truth is to be "rightly divided" thereon.

- First, **there is a general mercy of God**, which is extended not only to all men, believers and unbelievers alike, but also to the entire creation: "His tender mercies are over *all* His works" (Ps. 145:9): "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). God has upon the brute creation in their needs, and supplies them with suitable provision.
- Second, **there is a special mercy of God**, which is exercised toward the children of men, helping and succouring them, notwithstanding their sins. To them also He communicates all the necessities of life: "for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45).
- Third, **there is a sovereign mercy** which is reserved for the heirs of salvation, which is communicated to them in a covenant way, through the Mediator.

**Question # 3** - List out some of God's mercies on all men in general. What would be an appropriate response to these mercies?

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**Question # 4** - Describe how God's mercy towards sinners in general might serve as a connection or point of communication in sharing the gospel with an unbeliever.

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Following out a little further the difference between the second and third distinctions pointed out above, it is important to note that the mercies which God bestows on the wicked are solely of a *temporal* nature; that is to say, they are confined strictly to this present life. There will be no mercy extended to them beyond the grave:

**Isaiah 27: 11** - It is a people of no understanding: therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will show them no favour

But at this point a difficulty may suggest itself to some of our readers. Does not Scripture affirm that

**Psalm 136: 1** - His mercy endureth forever

Two things need to be pointed out in that connection. God can never cease to be merciful, for this is a quality of the Divine essence (Ps. 116:5); but the *exercise* of His mercy is regulated by His sovereign will. This must be so, for there is nothing outside Himself which obliges Him to act; if there were, that "something" would be *supreme*, and God would cease to be God.

It is pure sovereign grace which alone determines the exercise of Divine mercy. God expressly affirms this fact in

**Romans 9:15** - For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.

It is not the wretchedness of the creature which causes Him to show mercy, for God is not influenced by things outside of Himself as we are. If God *were* influenced by the abject misery of leprous sinners, He would cleanse and save *all* of them. But He does not. Why? Simply because it is not His pleasure and purpose so to do. Still less is it the merits of the creature which causes Him to bestow mercies upon them, for it is a contradiction in terms to speak of *meriting* "mercy."

**Titus 3: 5** - *Not* by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us

The one standing in direct antithesis from the other. Nor is it the merits of Christ which moves God to bestow mercies on His elect: that would be putting the effect for the cause. It is "through" or because of the tender mercy of our God that Christ was sent here to His people (Luke 1:78). The merits of Christ make it possible for God to *righteously* bestow spiritual mercies on His elect, justice having been fully satisfied by the Surety! No, mercy arises *solely* from God's imperial pleasure.

Again; though it be true, blessedly and gloriously true, that God's mercy "endureth forever," yet we must observe carefully the objects *to whom* His "mercy" is shown. Even the casting of the reprobate into the Lake of Fire is an act of *mercy*. The punishment of the wicked is to be contemplated from a threefold viewpoint. From God's side, it is an act of *justice*, vindicating His honour. The mercy of God is never shown to the prejudice of His holiness and righteousness. From their side, it is an act of *equity*, when they are made to suffer the due reward of their iniquities. But from the standpoint of the redeemed, the punishment of the wicked is an act of unspeakable *mercy*. How dreadful would it be if the present order of things when the children of God are obliged to live in the midst of the children of the Devil, should continue forever! Heaven would at once cease to be heaven if the ears of the saints still heard the blasphemous and filthy language of the reprobate. What a mercy that in the New Jerusalem "there shall in nowise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither worketh abomination" (Rev. 21:27)!

Lest the reader might think that in the last paragraph we have been drawing upon our imagination, let us appeal to Holy Scripture in support of what has been said.

**Psalm 143:12** - And of Thy *mercy* cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am Thy servant

**Psalm 136: 15** - God overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea: *for* His *mercy* endureth forever.

It was an act of vengeance upon Pharaoh and his hosts, but it was an act of "mercy" unto the Israelites. Again,

**Revelation 19: 1 - 3** - I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath *judged* the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath *avenged* the blood of His servants at her hand. And again they said, *Alleluia*. And her smoke rose up forever and ever.

From what has just been before us, let us note how vain is the presumptuous hope of the wicked, who, notwithstanding their continued defiance of God, nevertheless count upon His being merciful to them. How many there are who say, I do not believe that God will ever cast me into Hell; He is too merciful. Such a hope is a viper, which if cherished in their bosoms will sting them to death. God is a God of justice as well as mercy, and He has expressly declared that He will "by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:7). Yea, He has said, "The wicked *shall* be turned into hell, all the nations that forget God" (Ps. 9:17). As well might men reason: I do not believe that if filth be allowed to accumulate and sewerage become stagnant and people deprive themselves of fresh air, that a merciful God will let them fall a prey to a deadly fever. The fact is that those who neglect the laws of health are carried away by disease, notwithstanding God's mercy. Equally true is it that those who neglect the laws of spiritual health shall forever suffer the Second Death.

Unspeakably solemn is it to see so many *abusing* this Divine perfection. They continue to despise God's authority, trample upon His laws continue in sin, and yet presume upon His mercy. But God will not be unjust to Himself. God shows mercy to the truly penitent, but not to the impenitent (Luke 13:3). To continue in sin and yet reckon upon Divine mercy remitting punishment is diabolical. It is saying, "Let us do evil that good may come," and of all such it is written, whose "damnation is just" (Rom. 3:8). Presumption shall most certainly be disappointed; read carefully Deuteronomy 29:18-20. Christ is the spiritual Mercy-seat, and all who despise and reject His Lordship shall "perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little" (Ps. 2:12).

But let our final thought be of God's spiritual mercies unto His own people.

**Psalm 57: 10** - Thy mercy is great unto the heavens

The riches thereof transcend our loftiest thought.

**Psalm 103: 11** - For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him

None can measure it. The elect are designated "vessels of mercy" (Rom. 9:23). It is mercy that quickened them when they were dead in sins (Eph. 2:4,5). It is mercy that saves them (Titus 3:5). It is His abundant mercy which begat them unto an eternal inheritance (1 Peter 1:3). Time would fail us to tell of His preserving, sustaining, pardoning, supplying mercy. Unto His own, God is "the Father of mercies" (2 Cor. 1:3).

"When all Thy mercies, O my God, My rising soul surveys, Transported with the view I'm lost, In wonder, love, and praise."
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**Question # 5** - Does beholding God's mercy stir in you a deeper desire to know and enjoy God? How does this make Christ's work more precious and heaven more appealing?

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## THE LOVE OF GOD

There are three things told us in Scripture concerning the *nature* of God.

- First, "**God is spirit**" (John 4:24). In the Greek there is no indefinite article, and to say "God is a spirit" is most objectionable, for it places Him in a class with others. God is "spirit" in the highest sense. Because He is "spirit" He is incorporeal, having no visible substance. Had God a tangible body, He would not be omnipresent, He would be limited to one place; because He is spirit He fills heaven and earth.
- Second, **God is light** (1 John 1:5), which is the opposite of "darkness." In Scripture "darkness" stands for sin, evil, death; and "light" for holiness, goodness, life. God is light, means that He is the *sum* of all excellency.
- Third, "**God is love**" (1 John 4:8). It is not simply that God "loves," but that He *is* Love itself. Love is not merely one of His attributes, but His very nature.

There are many today who talk about the love of God, who are total strangers to the God of love. The Divine love is commonly regarded as a species of amiable weakness, a sort of good-natured indulgence; it is reduced to a mere sickly sentiment, patterned after human emotion.

**Question # 6** - In what ways are conceptions of God's love in our day off-balance or erroneous?

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Now the truth is that on this, as on everything else, our thoughts need to be formed and regulated by what is revealed thereon in Holy Scripture. That there is urgent need for this is apparent not only from the ignorance which so generally prevails, but also from the low state of spirituality which is now so sadly evident everywhere among professing Christians. How little real love there is for God. One chief reason for this is because our hearts are so little occupied with His wondrous love for His people. The better we are acquainted with His love—its character, fulness, blessedness—the more will our hearts be drawn out in love to Him.

1. The Love Of God Is **Uninfluenced, Undeserved**. By this we mean, there was nothing whatever in the objects of His love to call it into exercise, nothing in the creature to attract or prompt it. The love which one creature has for another is because of something in them; but the love of God is free, spontaneous, uncaused. The only reason why God loves any is found in His own sovereign will:

**Deuteronomy 7: 7 – 8** - The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but *because* the Lord loved thee



God has loved His people from everlasting, and therefore nothing of the creature can be the cause of what is found in God from eternity.

**1 John 4: 19** - We love Him, because He first loved us

God did not love us because we loved Him, but He loved us before we had a particle of love for Him. Had God loved us in return for ours, then it would not be spontaneous on His part; but because He loved us when we were loveless, it is clear that His love was uninfluenced. It is highly important if God is to be honored and the heart of His child established, that we should be quite clear upon this precious truth. God's love for me, and for each of "His own," was entirely unmoved by anything in them. What was there in me to attract the heart of God?

Absolutely nothing. But, to the contrary, everything to repel Him, everything calculated to make Him loathe me—sinful, depraved, a mass of corruption, with "no good thing" in me.

What was there in me that could merit esteem, Or give the Creator delight? 'Twas even so, Father, I ever must sing, Because it seemed good, in Thy sight.
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Like grace, the saving love of God is undeserved.

**Romans 5: 6** - Christ died for the ungodly

**Romans 5: 8** - God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us

What was there in me that could merit esteem, Or give the Creator delight? 'Twas even so, Father, I ever must sing, Because it seemed good in Thy sight.
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**Question # 7** - Does the fact that God's love is uninfluenced make it seem less personal? Is this impression accurate? Explain.

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2. It is Eternal. This of necessity. God Himself is eternal, and God is love; therefore, as God Himself had no beginning, His love had none. Granted that such a concept far transcends the grasp of our feeble minds, nevertheless, where we cannot comprehend, we can bow in adoring worship. How clear is the testimony of

**Jeremiah 31: 3** - I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.

How blessed to know that the great and holy God loved His people before heaven and earth were called into existence, that He had set His heart upon them from all eternity. Clear proof is this that His love is spontaneous, for He loved them endless ages before they had any being.

The same precious truth is set forth in

**Ephesians 1: 4 – 5** - According as He hath chosen us in Him *before* the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him. *In love* having predestinated us

What praise should this evoke from each of His children! How tranquilizing for the heart: since God's love toward me had no beginning, it can have no ending! Since it be true that "from everlasting to everlasting" He is God, and since God is "love," then it is equally true that "from everlasting to everlasting" He loves His people.

In the very beginning, when this great universe lay in the mind of God, like unborn forests in the acorn cup; long ere the echoes awoke the solitudes; before the mountains were brought forth; and long ere the light flashed through the sky, God loved His chosen creatures. Before there was any created being; when the ether was not fanned by an angel's wing, when space itself had not an existence, where there was nothing save God alone — even then, in that loneliness of Deity, and in that deep quiet and profundity, His bowels moved with love for His chosen. Their names were written on His heart, and then were they dear to His soul. Jesus loved His people before the foundation of the world — even from eternity! and when He called me by His grace, He said to me, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee'

*Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

3. **It Is Sovereign.** This also is self-evident. God Himself is sovereign, under obligations to none, a law unto Himself, acting always according to His own imperial pleasure. Since God be sovereign, and since He be love, it necessarily follows that His love is sovereign. Because God is God, He does as He pleases; because God is love, He loves whom He pleases. Such is His own express affirmation: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:19). There was no more reason in Jacob why he should be the object of Divine love, than there was in Esau. They both had the same parents, and were born at the same time, being twins; yet God loved the one and hated the other! Why? Because it pleased Him to do so.

The sovereignty of God's love necessarily follows from the fact that it is uninfluenced by anything in the creature. Thus, to affirm that the cause of His love lies in God Himself, is only another way of saying, He loves whom He pleases. For a moment, assume the opposite. Suppose God's love were regulated by anything else than His will, in such a case He would love by rule, and loving by rule He would be under a law of love, and then so far from being free, God would Himself be *ruled by law*. "In love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to"—what? Some excellency which He foresaw in them? No; what then? "According to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:4,5).

4. **It Is Infinite.** Everything about God is infinite. His essence fills heaven and earth. His *wisdom* is illimitable, for He knows everything of the past, present and future. His *power* is unbounded, for there is nothing too hard for Him. So His love is without limit. There is a depth to it which none can fathom; there is a height to it which none can scale; there is a length and breadth to it which defies measurement, by any creature-standard. Beautifully is this intimated in Ephesians

2:4: But God, who is rich in mercy, for His *great* love wherewith He loved us: the word "great" there is parallel with the "God so loved" of John 3:16. It tells us that the love of God is so transcendent it cannot be estimated.

No tongue can fully express the infinitude of God's love, or any mind comprehend it: it "passeth knowledge" Eph. 3:19. The most extensive ideas that a finite mind can frame about Divine love, are infinitely below its *true* nature. The heaven is not so far above the earth as the goodness of God is beyond the most raised conceptions which we are able to form of it. It is an *ocean* which swells higher than all the mountains of opposition in such as are the objects of it. It is a *fountain* from which flows all necessary good to all those who are interested in it.

*John Brine*

We should not in the least be surprised that this love of God is described as "**great**." It was because of his "great love for us" that God made us alive together with Christ. It is a great love because it can never be exhausted, its depths never plumbed, its purpose never thwarted by the sin of man (Eph. 2:4-5). And again, the context will not permit this love to be universalized.

This love impels to the efficacious actions [of being quickened together with Christ and raised with Him] and cannot have an extent broader than those embraced in the actions specified. The same kind of relationship obtains between the 'great love' and the saving actions as obtains between love and predestination in Ephesians 1:5 and, again, the quality of the love must be as distinctive as the saving acts which are its result

*Redemption Accomplished & Applied - John Murray*

5. It is **Immutable**. As with God Himself there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17), so His love knows neither change or diminution. The worm Jacob supplies a forceful example of this: "Jacob have I loved," declared Jehovah, and despite all his unbelief and waywardness, He never ceased to love him. John 13:1 furnishes another beautiful illustration. That very night one of the apostles would say, "Show us the Father"; another would deny Him with cursings; all of them would be scandalized by and forsake Him. Nevertheless "having loved His own which were in the world, He love them *unto the end*." The Divine love is subject to no vicissitudes. Divine love is "strong as death ... many waters cannot quench it" (Song of Sol. 8:6,7). Nothing can separate from it: Romans 8:35-39.

"His love no end nor measure knows,  
No change can turn its course,  
Eternally the same it flows  
From one eternal source."

This love is not only eternal in its conception, it is **irrevocable in its purpose**.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" (Rom. 8:35).

Nothing, Paul insists and assures, shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ. That alone can sever us from the embrace of God's love which is greater than God. Hence we rest secure.

My name from the palms of His hands  
Eternity will not erase;  
Impress'd on His heart it remains,  
In marks of indelible grace.

*Augustus Toplady*

6. **It Is Holy.** God's love is not regulated by caprice passion, or sentiment, but by principle. Just as His grace reigns not at the expense of it, but "through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21), so His love never conflicts with His holiness. "God is light" (1 John 1:5) is mentioned *before* "God is love" (1 John 4:8). God's love is no mere amiable weakness, or effeminate softness. Scripture declares, "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). God will not wink at sin, even in His own people. His love is *pure*, unmixed with any maudlin sentimentality.
7. **It Is Gracious.** The love and favor of God are inseparable. This is clearly brought out in Romans 8:32-39. What that love is from which there can be no "separation," is easily perceived from the design and scope of the immediate context: it is that goodwill and grace of God which determined Him to give His Son for sinners. That *love* was the impulsive power of Christ's incarnation: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Christ died not in order to make God love us, but because He did love His people, Calvary is the supreme demonstration of Divine love. Whenever you are tempted to doubt the love of God, Christian reader, go back to Calvary.
8. **It Is Manifested**
  - a. The peculiar love of the Father for the Son (John 3:35; 5:20) and of the Son for the Father (John 14:31).
  - b. God's providential love over all of his creation. Although the word "love" is itself rarely used in this way, there is no escaping the fact that the world is the product of a loving Creator (see the declaration of "good" over what God has made in Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31).
  - c. God's saving love toward the fallen world (John 3:16).
  - d. God's particular, effectual, selecting love for his elect. The elect may be the nation of Israel, or the church, or specific individuals. See esp. Deut. 7:7-8; 10:14-15; Eph. 5:25.
  - e. God's love toward his own people in a provisional or conditional way. Often the *experience* of God's love is portrayed as something that is conditioned upon obedience and the fear of God. This doesn't have to do with that love by which we are brought into a saving relationship with God but rather with our capacity to *feel and enjoy* the affection of God. See Jude 21; John 15:9-10; Psalm 103:9-18.
  - f. The eternal and irrevocable love which God has for His people also secures far more than merely the reconciliation of estranged sinners. This manifold design

of God's saving love is especially evident in John's first epistle. For example, the love that God has for us is said to make possible our love for one another. Following his discussion of God's love as witnessed in the atoning sacrifice of His Son (1 John 4:7-11), John writes:

**1 John 4: 12** - No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us

Other texts of Scripture confirm that God has never been seen (cf. 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; Exod. 33:20). How, then, can He be known?

**1 John 1: 18** - No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

This is all well and good, but for what purpose does John include it in this context? Evidently, according to John Stott, he wishes to say that

The unseen God, revealed once in His Son, is now revealed in His people if and when they love one another. God's love is seen in their love because their love is His love imparted to them by His Spirit

*John Stott*

Although God cannot be seen in Himself He can be seen in those in whom He abides when they love others with that very love wherewith they were loved! The fullness of God's redemptive love for us in Christ thus attains its intended goal in our love for one another.

*The Attributes Of God – A.W. Pink*

This notion that God's love has for its ultimate design more than the salvation of those on whom it is showered is seen yet again in 1 John 2:5. Here we read that "if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him." That is to say, the love of God achieves its ordained purpose when we as the recipients of it in turn obey Him from whom it has come forth.

John pursues this same theme from yet another angle in 1 John 4:17. "Love is made complete among us," he argues, "so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him." Once more, God's love secures its end to the degree that we who are its objects cease to fear the day of judgment. The knowledge of God's fatherly love should forever dispel any apprehension of standing in His presence. This is not presumption, but a Spirit-induced conviction that God's love has efficaciously and eternally provided for us in Christ that righteousness on the basis of which we are delivered from all penal liability. God's perfect love for us, when rightly perceived, does indeed cast out fear!

## **9. This Love Of God Is The Source Or Cause Of The Atoning Work Of Christ.**

**Galatians 2: 20** - I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, *who loved me and gave himself for me*

**1 John 4: 9 – 10** - This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but *that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*

**John 3: 16** - For God *so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son*, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

**Ephesians 5: 1 – 2** - Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as *Christ loved us and gave himself up for us* as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God

**Ephesians 5: 25** - Husbands, love your wives, just as *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*

Truly God is love. Love is not something adventitious; it is not something that God may choose to be or choose not to be. He is love, and that necessarily, inherently, and eternally. As God is spirit, as he is light, so he is love. Yet it belongs to the very essence of electing love to recognize that it is not inherently necessary to that love which God necessarily and eternally is that he should set such love as issues in redemption and adoption upon utterly undesirable and hell-deserving objects. It was of the free and sovereign good pleasure of his will, a good pleasure that emanated from the depths of his own goodness, that he chose a people to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. The reason resides wholly in himself and proceeds from determinations that are peculiarly his as the 'I am that I am

*Redemption Accomplished & Applied – John Murray*

#### **10. It Is Also To The Saving Love Of God That We Trace The Cause Of Our Predestination.**

**Romans 8: 29** - For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers

Many times in Scripture 'know' has a pregnant meaning which goes beyond that of mere cognition. It is used in a sense practically synonymous with love, to set regard upon, to know with peculiar interest, delight, affection, and action (of. Gen. 18:19; Exod. 2:25; Psalm 1:6; 144:3; Jer. 1:5; Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5; Matt. 7:23; I Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9; II Tim. 2:19; I John 3:1). There is no reason why this import of the word 'know' should not be applied to 'foreknow' in this passage, as also in 11:2 where it also occurs in the same kind of construction and where the thought of election is patently present (cf. 11: 5, 6). When this import is appreciated, then there is no reason for adding any qualifying notion and 'whom he foreknew' is seen to contain within itself the differentiating element required. It means 'whom he set regard upon' or 'whom he knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight' and is virtually equivalent to 'whom he foreloved'

*Redemption Accomplished & Applied - John Murray*

## 11. This Same Love Of God Is The Reason For Our Adoption As Sons.

**Ephesians 1: 4 – 5** - In love He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance [not with our foreseen faith but in accordance] with his pleasure and will

**1 John 3: 1** - How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God

Behold the amazing gift of love  
The Father hath bestowed,  
On us the sinful sons of men,  
To call us sons of God!

Isaac Watts

**Question # 8** - Describe the nature, extent, and quality of God's love. What about it is most astounding to you?

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**Question # 9** - Why is it important to affirm that God loved us first? What would be the problem if we affirmed the opposite?

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**12. We Have Confident Hope** on no other ground than that God has loved us in Christ. It is because He loved us when we were yet His enemies, a love demonstrated by the sending of His Son, that His love for us now that we are His friends is unshakable. This "much more" argument of Romans 5:8-11 is encouragement indeed. Paul says, in effect, that if when we were alienated from God, He, notwithstanding, reconciled us to Himself through His Son, how much more, now that we have been graciously instated in His favor and the alienation removed, shall the exalted and everlasting life of Christ insure our being saved to the uttermost!

It would be a violation of the wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness of God to suppose that he would have done the greater [love His enemies] and fail in the lesser [love His friends]

*Redemption Accomplished & Applied – John Murray*

## 1. There Is Abundant Cause For Trust And Patience under Divine affliction.

Christ was beloved of the Father, yet *He* was not exempted from poverty, disgrace, and persecution. *He* hungered and thirsted. Thus, it was not incompatible with God's *love* for Christ when He permitted men to spit upon and smite Him. Then let no Christian call into question God's love when he is brought under painful afflictions and trials. God did not enrich Christ on earth with temporal prosperity, for "He had not where to lay His head." But He *did* give Him the Spirit "without

measure" (John 3:34). Learn then that *spiritual* blessings are the principal gifts of Divine love. How blessed to know that when the world hates us ,God loves us!

**Question # 10** - How does the love of God provide comfort and strength in the midst of trials and difficulties? Give an example of how this might work practically?

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#### **14. Discipline, No Less Than Life, Is A Product Of The Divine Love**

**Hebrews 12: 5 – 6** - My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son

The Hebrew Christians to whom these words were addressed had mistakenly come to think that the absence of affliction was a sign of God's special favor and, therefore, that suffering and oppression were an indication of His displeasure.

Far from being a proof of God's anger or rejection of us, afflictions are evidence of His fatherly love. Discipline, is the mark not of a harsh and heartless father but of a father who is deeply and lovingly concerned for the well-being of his son

*Philip Hughes*

**15. The Love Of God As Incomprehensible!** And yet he prays specifically that we might know this love that "surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19).

God's love may be known in some features and to some extent, but at the same time it stretches away into infinitude, far beyond the ken of human discovery and analysis. As a fact manifested in time and embodied in the incarnation, life, teaching, and death of the Son of God, it may be understood, for it assumed a nature of clay, bled on the cross, and lay prostrate in the tomb; but in its unbeginning existence as an eternal passion, antedating alike the Creation and the Fall, it 'passeth knowledge.' In the blessings which it confers - the pardon, grace, and glory which it provides - it may be seen in palpable exhibition, and experienced in happy consciousness; but in its limitless power and endless resources it baffles thought and description. In the terrible sufferings and death to which it led, and in the self-denial and sacrifices which it involved, it may be known so far by the application of human instincts and analogies; but the fathomless fervour of a Divine affection surpasses the measurements of created intellect. As the attachment of a man, it may be gauged; but as the love of a God, who can by searching find it out? Uncaused itself it originated salvation; unresponded to amidst the 'contradiction of sinners,' it neither pined nor collapsed. It led from Divine immortality to human agonies and dissolution, for the victim was bound to the cross not by the nails of the military executioner, but by the 'cords of love.' It loved repulsive unloveliness, and, unnourished by reciprocated attachment, its



ardour was unquenched, nay, is unquenchable, for it is  
changeless as the bosom in which it dwells

*John Eadie*

## PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK

### Read Chapter 17 – The Contemplation Of God

**Question # 1** - Do you agree that dwelling on the person of God is beneficial? If so, how exactly does it benefit someone?

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**Question # 2** - Why is it that man will never be able to fully comprehend God?

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**Question # 3** - Does the fact that you will never fully comprehend the infinite personhood of God delight or discourage you? Explain.

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**Question # 4** - How is God sufficient where all other competing idols in our lives fall short? Is this reflected in your affections, your decisions, your actions.

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**Question # 5** - Describe the value of knowing God. How might this affect the way you spend your time, what you look forward to, how you spend your money, etc.?

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**Question # 6** - In what specific ways has your view of God changed or been enhanced through this study? How has this affected you practically?

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# The Attributes Of God

A.W. Pink

FBC Adult Christian Education Dec 2010 – Feb 2011

Lesson # 13 – 28 February 2011

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## THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD

What were we made for? What aim should we set ourselves in life? **To know God.** What is the “eternal life” that Jesus give? **Knowledge of God.** “This is life eternal, **that they might know Thee**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3). What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? **Knowledge of God.** “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but **let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me**” (Jer. 9:23f). What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives Him most pleasure? **Knowledge of Himself.** “**I desire...the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,**” says God (Hos. 6:6).

*Knowing God – J.I. Packer*

**A.** In the previous chapters we have had in review some of the wondrous and lovely perfections of the Divine character. From this most feeble and faulty contemplation of His attributes, it should be evident to us all that **God is, first, an incomprehensible Being.** Lost in wonder at His infinite greatness, we are constrained to adopt the words of Zophar,

**Job 11: 7 – 9** - Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.

When we turn our thoughts to God’s eternity, His immateriality, His omnipresence, His almightiness, our minds are overwhelmed.

But the incomprehensibility of the Divine nature is not a reason why we should desist from reverent inquiry and prayerful strivings to apprehend what He has so graciously revealed of Himself in His Word. Because we are unable to acquire perfect knowledge, it would be folly to say we will therefore make no efforts to attain to *any* degree of it. It has been well said that,

"Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued, investigation of the great subject of the Deity. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and Him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity."

*C. H. Spurgeon*

Let us quote a little further from this prince of preachers.

The proper study of the Christian is the God-head. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the doings, and the existence of the great God which he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go on our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, amid that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought "I am but of yesterday and know nothing."

*C.H. Spurgeon*

**Question # 1** - Do you agree that dwelling on the person of God is beneficial? If so, how exactly does it benefit someone?

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Yes, the incomprehensibility of the Divine nature should teach us **humility, caution and reverence**. After all our searchings and meditations we have to say with Job,

**Job 26: 14** - Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him!

When Moses besought Jehovah for a sight of His glory, He answered him "I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee" (Ex. 33:19), and, as another has said, "the name is the collection of His attributes." Rightly did the Puritan John Howe declare:

The notion therefore we can hence form of His glory, is only such as we may have of a large volume by a brief synopsis, or of a spacious country by a little landscape. He hath here given us a true report of Himself, but not a full; such as will secure our apprehensions—being guided thereby—from error, but not from ignorance. We can apply our minds to contemplate the several perfections whereby the blessed God discovers to us His being, and can in our thoughts attribute them all to Him, though we have still but low and defective conceptions of each one. Yet so far as our apprehensions can correspond to the discovery that He affords us of His several excellencies, we have a present view of His glory.

*John Howe*

As the difference is indeed great between the knowledge of God which His saints have in this life and that which they shall have in Heaven, yet, as the former should not be undervalued because it is imperfect, so the latter is not to be magnified above its reality.

True, the Scripture declares that we shall see "face to face" and "know" even as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12), but to infer from this that we shall then know God as fully as He knows us, is to be misled by the mere sound of words, and to disregard that restriction of the same which the subject necessarily requires. There is a vast difference between the saints being glorified and their being made Divine. In their glorified state, **Christians will still be finite creatures, and therefore, never able to fully comprehend the infinite God.**

The saints in heaven will see God with the eye of the mind, for He will be always invisible to the bodily eye; and will see Him more clearly than they could see Him by reason and faith, and more extensively than all His works and dispensations had hitherto revealed Him; but their minds will not be so enlarged as to be capable of contemplating at once, or in detail, the whole excellence of His nature. To comprehend infinite perfection, they must become infinite themselves. Even in Heaven, their knowledge will be partial, but at the same time their happiness will be complete, because their knowledge will be perfect in this sense, that it will be adequate to the capacity of the subject, although it will not exhaust the fulness of the object. We believe that it will be progressive, and that as their views expand, their blessedness will increase; but it will never reach a limit beyond which there is nothing to be discovered; and when ages after ages have passed away, He will still be the incomprehensible God.

*John Dick*

**Question # 2** - Why is it that man will never be able to fully comprehend God?

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**Question # 3** - Does the fact that you will never fully comprehend the infinite personhood of God delight or discourage you? Explain.

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**B. Secondly**, from a review of the perfections of God, it appears that **He is an all-sufficient Being. He is all-sufficient in Himself and to Himself.** As the First of beings, He could receive nothing from another, nor be limited by the power of another. Being infinite, He is possessed of all possible perfection. When the Triune God existed all alone, He was all to Himself. His understanding, His love, His energies, found an adequate object in Himself.

Had He stood in need of anything external, He had not been *independent*, and therefore would not have been God. He created all things, and that "for Himself" (Col. 1:16), yet it was not in order to supply a lack, but that He might communicate life and happiness to angels and men, and admit them to the vision of His glory. True, He demands the allegiance and services of His intelligent creatures, yet *He* derives no benefit from their offices, all the advantage redounds to themselves: Job 22:2,3. He makes use of means and instruments to accomplish His ends, yet not from a deficiency of power, but often times to more strikingly display His power through the feebleness of the instruments.

The all-sufficiency of God makes Him to be the Supreme Object which is ever to be sought unto. True happiness consists only in the enjoyment of God. His favour is life, and His loving kindness is better than life.

**Lamentations 3: 24** - The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him

His love, His grace, His glory, are the chief objects of the saints' desire and the springs of their highest satisfaction.

**Psalms 4: 6 – 7** - There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of *Thy* countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased

Yea, the Christian, when in his right mind, is able to say,

**Habbakuk 3: 17 – 18** - Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cutoff from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice *in the Lord*, I will joy in the God of my salvation

**Question # 4** - How is God sufficient where all other competing idols in our lives fall short? Is this reflected in your affections, your decisions, your actions?

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**C. Thirdly**, from a review of the perfections of God, it appears that **He is the Supreme Sovereign of the universe**. It has been rightly said:

No dominion is so absolute as that which is founded on creation. He who might not have made any thing, had a right to make all things according to His own pleasure. In the exercise of His uncontrolled power, He has made some parts of the creation mere inanimate matter, of grosser or more refined texture, and distinguished by different qualities, but all inert and unconscious. He has given organization to other parts, and made them susceptible of growth and expansion, but still without life in the proper sense of the term. To others He has given not only organization, but conscious existence, organs of sense and self-motive power. To these He has added in man the gift of reason, and an immortal spirit, by which he is allied to a higher order of beings who are placed in the superior regions.

Over the world which He has created, He sways the scepter of omnipotence. "I praised and honored Him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doeth Thou?"

*John Dick*

A creature, considered as such, has no rights. He can demand nothing from his Maker; and in whatever manner he may be treated, has no title to complain. Yet, when thinking of the absolute dominion of God over all, we ought never to lose sight of His moral perfections. God is just and good, and ever does that which is right. Nevertheless, He exercises His sovereignty according to His own imperial and righteous pleasure. He assigns each creature his place as seemeth good in His own sight. He orders the varied circumstances of each according to His own counsels. He moulds each vessel according to His own uninfluenced determination. He has mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardens. Wherever we are, His eye is upon us. Whoever we are, our life and everything is held at His disposal. To the Christian, He is a tender Father; to the rebellious sinner He will yet be a consuming fire.

**1 Timothy 1: 17** - Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen

#### **D. Fit For Contemplation - The Titles Of God**

**Question # 5** - What comes to mind when you hear the word "God"? What is your concept of the Creator?

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**Coach?** I've talked with people who relate to God as if He were something of a *coach*. There's no real relationship, at least not on a personal level. Joining the church is like making the team. When God does choose to communicate, it isn't with soft-spoken words of loving encouragement but with an angry shout of "Run faster! Jump higher! Two more laps!" One's responsibility is to train hard, perform well on game day, and perhaps be fortunate enough to get a slap on the seat and a perfunctory 'Nice job.'

**Teacher?** Others think of God more as a *teacher*. To them, being a Christian means studying harder, learning more, memorizing doctrines and texts of Scripture and then regurgitating it all on test day. The important thing is getting all "A's" and graduating to the next "grade" of spirituality. God's primary role is to make sure we spell His name right and assign detention when we misbehave.

**Boss?** Then there are those for whom God is a *boss*. Getting a good job in the kingdom is priority one. Christians are just so many employees who are responsible for getting to work on time and putting in a solid eight hours. God is there principally to fill out performance reports and to decide who gets a raise, who gets a vacation, and who gets fired!

**Father?** To speak to such people about God being their *Father* can be risky. It not only doesn't compute, it confuses and angers them. The reason isn't hard to understand. The very word, *Father*, may yet evoke the image of an abusive bully with a stick in his hand. Others think only of a void in their home, the never-present father whose selfish disregard for their needs hurts as much now as it did then.

- *The Distant or Passive Father*
- *The Absent Father*
- *The Authoritarian Father*
- *The Accusing Father*
- *The Abusive Father*

## **God, The Father Of Jesus**

Jesus always spoke of God as "my Father," whether as a formal designation or an address to God in prayer. Closer study reveals that **Jesus used this address in all his prayers, with one exception**. From the cross he cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

The reason for this sole exception is not simply that Jesus was drawing from an Old Testament text in which the form of address was already supplied (Psalm 22:2). His cry, "My God," rather than "My Father," was a consequence of the judgment to which he was being subjected. Jesus evidently regarded his relationship to God as penal and judicial, not paternal and filial, as he hung on Calvary's tree for sinners. But in the other twenty-one instances where Jesus prayed, he always addressed God as his Father.

In the Old Testament, God was referred to in many ways, **but rarely as Father**. Apart from several texts in which God is compared with an earthly father (for example, Psalm 103:13; Proverbs 3:12; Jeremiah 31:20), **the word is used of Him only fifteen times**.

1. In seven instances God is conceived as Father of the nation Israel (Deut. 32:6; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 31:9; Malachi 1:6; 2:10).
2. In five other passages God is called the Father of the king in fulfillment of one element of the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Psalm 89:26).
3. God is called Father of the orphaned in a song of praise for His tenderness (Psalm 68:5).
4. In two cases where "my Father" is used as an invocation to God in prayer, it is a prayer, not of any single individual, but of the nation collectively (Jeremiah 3:4, 19).

Judging from these passages, it was anything but characteristic of Old Testament spiritual life to refer to God as Father in personal prayer and communion. That depth of intimacy with the Almighty was rare indeed.

Yet, aside from the exception noted above, this is precisely what our Lord Jesus Christ did *every time* He prayed!

Still more significant is the fact that He used the word **Abba** when referring to the Father (Mark 14:36; most scholars agree that the Aramaic term *abba* lies back of the Greek *pater*). *Abba* was a term used in Judaism to express the intimacy, security, and tenderness of a family relationship. More specifically, it was a word that tiny children used to address their fathers. Of course, it didn't preclude courtesy and respect. But above all it was an expression of warm affection and trust.

We read in the Talmud that when a child is weaned it learns to say "abba" (daddy) and "imma" (mommy) (Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 57). Again, the point is that "there is no analogy at all in the whole literature of Jewish prayer (specifically the Palestinian Judaism of our Lord's day) for God being addressed as Abba" (Jeremias, 57). Joachim Jeremias argues that "to the Jewish mind it would have been disrespectful and therefore inconceivable to address God with this familiar word. For Jesus to venture to take this step was something new and unheard of. He spoke to God like a child to its father: simply, inwardly, confidently. Jesus' use of *abba* in addressing God reveals the heart of his relationship with God" (62).

## **God, The Father Of Every Christian**

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Roman (8:15-16) and Galatian (4:6) Christians, saying that we as God's children may likewise address our Father in this way, the depth of that intimacy with God secured for us by the cross of Christ becomes joyfully evident.

**Roman 8: 15 – 16** - For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

**Galatian 4: 4 - 7** - When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

\* It is important to observe the connection between vv. 15 and 16 in Romans 8. The knowledge that we are sons of God is not a conclusion we draw from the fact that we cry "Abba! Father!" Our cry of "Abba!" is itself the result or fruit of that conviction which the Holy Spirit has evoked in our hearts. In other words, we first receive the Holy Spirit, who then produces in our hearts the unassailable confidence that we are God's children, an assurance that leads us to cry out, in the Spirit's power, "Abba! Father!"

Just think of it! The one, true God who beckons you with the promise of perfect love is none other than your Father, Abba! You need not fear an abusive grasp or a stiff-armed rejection. He longs to embrace you, to relieve your fears, to soothe the wounds inflicted by those who exploited your weakness.

There is joy unspeakable in this truth. How can I describe the comfort and thrill in knowing that the One into whose arms we rush and, as it were, on whose lap we sit, is our Father, our "Daddy." He, in the crook of whose arm we repose, is our Abba. No earthly father ever embraced his child with such affection and tenderness as does He who cradles you with a song.

*The Fatherhood Of God – Sam Storm*

## **The Names Of God**

- **ELOHIM**.....Genesis 1: 1, Psalm 19: 1 - God, a reference to God's power and might.
- **ADONAI**.....Malachi 1: 6 - Lord, a reference to the Lordship of God.
- **JEHOVAH--YAHWEH**.....Genesis 2: 4 - a reference to God's divine salvation.
- **JEHOVAH-MACCADESHEM**.....Exodus 31: 13 - The Lord thy sanctifier
- **JEHOVAH-ROHI**.....Psalm 23: 1 - The Lord my shepherd
- **JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH**.....Ezekiel 48: 35 - The Lord who is present
- **JEHOVAH-RAPHA**.....Exodus 15: 26 - The Lord our healer
- **JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU**.....Jeremiah 23: 6 - The Lord our righteousness
- **JEHOVAH-JIREH**.....Genesis 22: 13-14 – The Lord will provide
- **JEHOVAH-NISSI**.....Exodus 17: 15 - The Lord our banner
- **JEHOVAH-SHALOM**.....Judges 6: 24 - The Lord is peace
- **JEHOVAH-SABBAOTH**.....Isaiah 6: 1-3 - The Lord of Hosts
- **JEHOVAH-GMOLAH**.....Jeremiah 51: 6 - The God of Recompense
- **EL-ELYON**.....Genesis 14: 17-20, Isaiah 14: 13-14 - The most high God
- **EL-ROI**.....Genesis 16: 13 - The strong one who sees
- **EL-SHADDAI**.....Genesis 17: 1, Psalm 91: 1 - The God of the mountains or God Almighty
- **EL-OLAM**.....Isaiah 40: 28-31 - The everlasting God

## **Titles Of Our Lord, Jesus The Christ**



- **Abba** - Romans 8: 15
- **Advocate** - 1 John 2: 1 (KJV)
- **Almighty** - Genesis 17: 1
- **Alpha** - Revelation 22: 13
- **Amen** - Revelation 3: 14
- **Ancient Of Days** - Daniel 7: 9
- **Anointed One** - Psalm 2: 2
- **Apostle** - Hebrews 3: 1
- **Arm Of The Lord** - Isaiah 53: 1
- **Author Of Life** - Acts 3: 15
- **Author Of Our Faith** - Hebrews 12: 2
- **Beginning** - Revelation 21: 6
- **Blessed & Holy Ruler** - 1 Timothy 6: 15
- **Branch** - Jeremiah 33: 15
- **Bread Of God** - John 6: 33
- **Bread Of Life** - John 6: 35
- **Bridegroom** - Isaiah 62: 56
- **Bright Morning Star** - Revelation 22: 16
- **Chief Shepherd** - 1 Peter 5: 4
- **Chosen One** - Isaiah 42: 1
- **Christ** - Matthew 22: 42
- **Christ Of God** - Luke 9: 20
- **Christ The Lord** - Luke 2: 11
- **Christ, Son Of Living God** - Matthew 16: 16
- **Comforter** - John 14: 26 (KJV)
- **Commander** - Isaiah 55: 4
- **Consolation Of Israel** - Luke 2: 25
- **Consuming Fire** - Deut 4: 24, Heb 12: 29
- **Cornerstone** - Isaiah 28: 16
- **Counselor** - Isaiah 9: 6
- **Creator** - 1 Peter 4: 19
- **Deliverer** - Romans 11: 26
- **Desired Of All Nations** - Haggai 2: 7
- **Door** - John 10: 7 (KJV)
- **End** - Revelation 21: 6
- **Eternal God** - Deut - 33: 27
- **Everlasting Father** - Isaiah 9: 6
- **Faithful & True** - Revelation 19: 11
- **Faithful Witness** - Revelation 1: 5
- **Father** - Matthew 6: 9
- **Firstborn** - Rom 8: 29, Rev 1: 5, Col 1: 15
- **Firstfruits** - 1 Cor 15: 20 - 23
- **Foundation** - 1 Cor 3: 11
- **Friend Of Tax Collectors & Sinners** - Matthew 11: 19
- **Gentle Whisper** - 1 Kings 19: 12
- **Gift Of God** - John 4: 10
- **Glory Of The Lord** - Isaiah 40: 5
- **God** - Genesis 1: 1
- **God Almighty** - Genesis 17: 1
- **God Over All** - Romans 9: 5
- **God Who Sees Me** - Genesis 16: 13
- **Good Shepherd** - John 10: 11
- **Great High Priest** - Hebrews 4: 14
- **Great Shepherd** - Hebrews 13: 20
- **Guide** - Psalm 48: 14
- **Head Of The Body** - Colossians 1: 18
- **Head Of The Church** - Ephesians 5: 23
- **Heir Of All Things** - Hebrews 1: 2
- **High Priest** - Hebrews 3: 1
- **High Priest Forever** - Hebrews 6: 20
- **Holy One** - Acts 2: 27
- **Holy One Of Israel** - Isaiah 49: 7
- **Holy Spirit** - John 15: 26
- **Hope** - Titus 2: 13
- **Horn Of Salvation** - Luke 1: 69
- **I Am** - Exodus 3: 14, John 8: 58
- **Image Of God** - 2 Cor 4: 4
- **Image Of His Person** - Hebrews 1: 3 (KJV)
- **Immanuel** - Isaiah 7: 14
- **Jealous** - Exodus 34: 14 (KJV)
- **Jehovah** - Psalm 83: 18 (KJV)
- **Jesus** - Matthew 1: 21

- **Jesus Christ Our Lord** - Romans 6: 23
- **Judge** - Isaiah 33: 22, Acts 10: 42
- **King** - Zechariah 9: 9
- **King Eternal** - 1 Timothy 1: 17
- **King Of Kings** - 1 Timothy 6: 15
- **King Of The Ages** - Revelation 15: 3
- **Lamb Of God** - John 1: 29
- **Last Adam** - 1 Cor - 15: 45
- **Lawgiver** - Isaiah 33: 22
- **Leader** - Isaiah 55: 4
- **Life** - John 14: 6
- **Light Of The World** - John 8: 12
- **Like An Eagle** - Deut 32: 11
- **Lily Of The Valleys** - Song 2: 1
- **Lion Of The Tribe Of Judah** - Revelation 5: 5
- **Living Stone** - 1 Peter 2: 4
- **Living Water** - John 4: 10
- **Lord** - John 13: 13
- **Lord God Almighty** - Revelation 15: 3
- **Lord Jesus Christ** - 1 Cor 15: 57
- **Lord Of All** - Acts 10: 36
- **Lord Of Glory** - 1 Cor 2: 8
- **Lord Of Hosts** - Haggai 1: 5
- **Lord Of Lords** - 1 Tim 6: 15
- **Lord Our Righteousness** - Jeremiah 23: 6
- **Love** - 1 John 4: 8
- **Man Of Sorrows** - Isaiah 53: 3
- **Master** - Luke 5: 5
- **Mediator** - 1 Timothy 2: 5
- **Merciful God** - Jeremiah 3: 12
- **Messenger Of The Covenant** - Malachi 3: 1
- **Messiah** - John 4: 25
- **Mighty God** - Isaiah 9: 6
- **Mighty One** - Isaiah 60: 16
- **Nazarene** - Matthew 2: 23
- **Offspring Of David** - Revelation 22: 16
- **Omega** - Revelation 22: 13
- **Only Begotten Son** - John 1: 18 (KJV)
- **Our Passover Lamb** - 1 Cor 5: 7
- **Our Peace** - Ephesians 2: 14
- **Potter** - Isaiah 64: 8
- **Power Of God** - 1 Cor 1: 24
- **Prince Of Peace** - Isaiah 9: 6
- **Prophet** - Acts 3: 22
- **Purifier** - Malachi 3: 3
- **Rabboni (Teacher)** - John 20: 16
- **Radiance Of God's Glory** - Heb 1: 3
- **Redeemer** - Job 19: 25
- **Refiner's Fire** - Malachi 3: 2
- **Resurrection** - John 11: 25
- **Righteous One** - 1 John 2: 1
- **Rock** - 1 Cor 10: 4
- **Root Of David** - Rev 22: 16
- **Rose Of Sharon** - Song 2: 1
- **Ruler Of God's Creation** - Rev 3: 14
- **Ruler Over Kings Of Earth** - Rev 1: 5
- **Ruler Over Israel** - Micah 5: 2
- **Savior** - Luke 2: 11
- **Scepter Out Of Israel** - Numbers 24: 17
- **Seed** - Genesis 3: 15
- **Servant** - Isaiah 42: 1
- **Shepherd Of Our Souls** - 1 Peter 2: 25
- **Shield** - Genesis 15: 1
- **Son Of David** - Matthew 1: 1
- **Son Of God** - Matthew 27: 54
- **Son Of Man** - Matthew 8: 20
- **Son Of The Most High** - Luke 1: 32
- **Source** - Hebrews 5: 9
- **Spirit Of God** - Genesis 1: 2
- **Star Out Of Jacob** - Numbers 24: 17
- **Stone** - 1 Peter 2: 8
- **Sun Of Righteousness** - Malachi 4: 2
- **Teacher** - John 13: 13

- **True Light** - John 1: 9
- **True Witness** - Revelation 3: 14
- **Truth** - John 14: 6
- **Vine** - John 15: 5
- **Way** - John 14: 6

- **Wisdom Of God** - 1 Cor 1: 24
- **Witness** - Isaiah 55: 4
- **Wonderful** - Isaiah 9: 6
- **Word** - John 1: 1
- **Word Of God** - Revelation 19: 1

**Question # 6** - *Describe the value of knowing God. How might this affect the way you spend your time, what you look forward to, how you spend your money, etc.?*

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**Question # 7** - *In what specific ways has your view of God changed or been enhanced through this study? How has this affected you practically?*

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