

Steve Whitacre

SESSION 1 | Omnipresence

“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3).

“May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,” (2 Peter 1:2–3).

“What makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance; and this the Christian has in a way that no other person has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God?” J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 34.

“Well might God say through Jeremiah, ‘Let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me’—for knowing God is a relationship calculated to thrill a person’s heart.” J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 36.

I. WHAT ARE INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES?

“For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to ‘lisp’ in speaking to us?” John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, I:121.

“When we speak of the attributes of God, we are referring to those qualities of God that constitute what he is, the very characteristics of his nature. We are not referring here to his acts, such as creating, guiding, and preserving, nor to his corresponding roles of Creator, Guide, Preserver.” Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology, 2nd Edition*, 291.

“The *incommunicable attributes* of God [are] those attributes that God does not share or ‘communicate’ to others and the *communicable attributes* of God [are] those God shares or ‘communicates’ with us.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 156.

Why study the incommunicable attributes?

“The doctrine of God is the central point for much of the rest of theology. One’s view of God might even be thought of as supplying the whole framework within which one’s theology is constructed, life is lived, and ministry is conducted.” Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology, 2nd Edition*, 290.

What can we know about the incommunicable attributes?

“When we speak of the incomprehensibility of God, then, we do not mean that there is an unknown being or essence beyond or behind his attributes. Rather, we mean that we do not know his qualities or his nature completely and exhaustively. We know God only as he has revealed himself. While his self-revelation is doubtless consistent with his full nature and accurate, it is not an exhaustive revelation. Further, we do not totally understand or know comprehensively that which he has revealed to us of himself. Thus, there is, and always will be, an element of mystery regarding God.” Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology, 2nd Edition*, 292.

II. OMNIPRESENCE: A DEFINITION

“God’s omnipresence may be defined as follows: *God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places.*” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 173.

“God is infinite. This means not only that God is unlimited, but that he is unlimitable. In this respect, God is unlike anything we experience. Even those things that common sense once told us are infinite or boundless are now seen to have limits.” Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology, 2nd Edition*, 298.

“If, as I will argue, God is not a corporeal being, spatial omnipresence cannot mean that God is a physical substance spread through the material universe. What it means, rather, is that God’s power, knowledge, and ability to act in the finite world are universal. God can instantly act at any place; he knows everything that happens, and he personally governs and directs everything in the universe.” John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 386.

III. THE LORD IS IN EVERY PLACE

A. God is present everywhere

“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.” (Psalm 139:7–10).

“Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 23:23–24).

“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” (Proverbs 15:3).

“Does not he see my ways and number all my steps?” (Job 31:4).

“For his eyes are on the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps.” (Job 34:21).

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars.” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

“For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes.” (Jeremiah 16:17).

B. God cannot be measured in spatial terms and cannot be contained

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27).

“Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” (Isaiah 66:1–2).

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17:24–25).

IV. THE LORD IS IN SOME PLACES DIFFERENTLY THAN OTHERS

A. God may be present to punish

“I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said: “Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left of them I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall flee away; not one of them shall escape. “If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. If they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search them out and take them; and if they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them. And if they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them; and I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good.” (Amos 9:1–4).

“When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold... Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Revelation 6:12, 15–17).

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,” (Jude 24).

B. God may be present to sustain

“And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:17).

“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” (Hebrews 1:3).

C. God may be present to bless

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11).

“In fact, most of the time that the Bible talks about God’s presence, it is referring to God’s presence to bless.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 176.

D. The Lord has been and is present in special ways...

- ...in the temple/tabernacle

“As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord’s house.” (2 Chronicles 7:1–2).

- ...in Christ

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14).

- ...in Christians by the Spirit

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.” (Joel 2:28–29).

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1–4).

“Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18–20).

- ...in the church

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.” (1 Corinthians 3:16–17).

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19–22).

V. SO WHAT?

The omnipresence of God *reminds us...*

- ... of God’s providence.
- ...of God’s omniscience.
- ...of God’s greatness.
- ...of our reasons for humility.

“What little, little, little things are we to God! less than an atom in the beams of the sun; poor drops to a God who fills heaven and earth, and yet dare we to strut against him and dash ourselves against a rock? If the consideration of ourselves in comparison with others, be apt to puff us up, the consideration of ourselves in comparison with God, will be sufficient to pull us down. If we consider him in the greatness of his essence, there is but little more proportion between him and us, than between being and not being, than between a drop and the ocean.” Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, I:395.

The omnipresence of God *comforts us...*

- ... in temptations
- ... in sharp afflictions

“That God is present everywhere, is as much a comfort to a good man, as it is a terror to a wicked one. He is everywhere for his people, not only by a necessary perfection of his nature, but an immense diffusion of his goodness. He is in all creatures as their preserver; in the damned, as their terror; in his people, as their protector. He fills hell with his severity, heaven with his glory, his people with his grace. He is with his people as light in darkness, a foundation in a garden, as manna in the ark.” Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, I:398

The omnipresence of God *exhorts us...*

- ... to confident prayer
- ... to enthusiastic worship
- ... to holy living

"Without this we signify nothing: though we live without this, we cannot be distinguished forever from devils; his essential presence they have; and if we have no more, we shall be no better. It is the enlivening fructifying presence of the sun that revives the languishing earth; and this only can repair our ruined soul. Let it be, therefore, our desire, that as he fills heaven and earth by his essence, he may fill our understandings and wills by his grace, that we may have another kind of presence with us than animals have in their brutish state, or devils in their chains: his essential presence maintains our beings, but his gracious presence confers and continues a happiness." Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, I:405.