

***The Godhead:
A Study Of The Father,
Son And Holy Spirit***

The 1998

POWER



Lectures

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Southaven, Mississippi

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Lectureship Director

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Dedication

NO ONE LOOKS FORWARD to the lectureship at the Southaven church of Christ any more than the man to whom we dedicate this year's lectureship book. His enthusiasm is directly related to his great love for good, old-fashioned, book, chapter and verse, gospel preaching. He developed this love for gospel preaching at an early age, and was baptized into Jesus Christ in 1957. His love for the Word of God hasn't diminished since the days of his youth. If there is a gospel meeting nearby, you can be sure to find him in attendance at least one night of the meeting, and often more than one night. He is a great encourager of gospel preachers. He is one of the first to approach me each Sunday to offer commendation for the lesson.

His fingerprints are all over the various programs of the Southaven church of Christ. He has served as a deacon at the Southaven congregation since 1978. He has worked long and hard around the church building to keep the landscape bright and beautiful. In addition, he has put on his "Mr. Fix-It" hat to do everything from fixing the preacher's homes to helping the widows of the congregation.

However, his contributions to the church extend far beyond the physical. He has served diligently in the Faith-In-Action program, serving as team member, team captain, and coordinator of the program. Just as he fought fires for 30 years as a fireman in the Memphis Fire Department, he has devoted himself to snatching souls out of the fire of hell (Jude 21).

He exerts a tremendous influence upon young people, encouraging them by regular attendance at their sporting events. More importantly, he has been a regular teacher of young people in the Bible School program. His great

love for the Bible makes it only fitting that he serves as “Mr. Bible” each year at Vacation Bible School.

Moreover, he has endeared himself to scores of young people in his work at Sardis Lake Christian Camp each summer since 1982. Only illness kept him from serving at camp in 1998. Yet, “Mr. Charles” has not allowed his cancer to dampen his spirits. He continues to work and pray everyday in the vineyard of the Lord.

Therefore, it is with prayers and great expectations for a continued and complete recovery, and great appreciation for service rendered to the Lord’s Kingdom that the 1998 **POWER** lectureship book is affectionately dedicated to Charles Frazier.



Charles Frazier

Acknowledgements

I AM SO THANKFUL to so many individuals who contributed to the production of this volume. First, and foremost, I am thankful to Almighty God for the opportunity to publish a volume designed to bring praise and honor to His high and holy name. Of course, this book is no substitute for the Bible and its revelation of the mind of God, but it is designed to be read with Bible in hand in hopes that the reader may be brought closer to the Godhead.

I want to express deep gratitude to all who wrote manuscripts for the book. I have learned much and profited greatly from reading their material, and I am confident that you will be richly rewarded as well.

I am especially grateful to Geraldine Chaney for her special assistance in bringing this book to fruition. She is more than a church secretary; she is a dear friend and sister in Christ. She has made my job so much easier.

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Last, but certainly not least, I thank the elders of the Southaven church, Bill Pierce and Coleman Simpson. These men “hold fast to the faithful word” (Titus 1:9) and love the truth. They will not tolerate any uncertain sound. Their leadership is a blessing to me and the local church.

--B. J. Clarke, Editor

Foreword

CAN WE KNOW that there is a God in heaven, and if so, can we know what He is like? It is to these two basic questions that this book is directed. One chapter is devoted to proving the existence of God while the balance of the book is designed to investigate the attributes of the Godhead.

The need for a book on the Godhead is clearly seen on two fronts. First, there is no greater subject upon which the mind of man can dwell than that of God. No query is more significant, no investigation more crucial. Regarding the study of God, A. W. Tozer suggested, "To the soul that is athirst for God, nothing could be more delightful." Frederick W. Faber wrote,

Only to sit and think of God,
Oh what a joy it is!
To think the thought to breathe the Name,
Earth has no higher bliss.

The second reason this book is sorely needed is because of the vast array of misconceptions concerning God which exist in our world today. In a book entitled *What Do We Mean When We Say God?* thousands of people attempt to answer the question. Consider the following two answers, answers which demonstrate how much confusion exists regarding God:

My opinion of God is that everyone sees God in their own way. I see God as being black because I am black. In the same breath, a white person might see God as being white. I have no objection because we both have the same God, we just see Him differently.

The feeling I get from the word “God” is one of love. I think He is a very different kind of being, a kind, gentle thing--in a way, Santa Claus comes to mind. I know Santa Claus is not real, but if he was, God would have the exact personality of him.

It would be nice to say that misconceptions of God are confined to the secular world. However, we agree with Tozer, who wrote:

The church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshiping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic...A whole new philosophy of the Christian life has resulted from this one basic error in our religious thinking (**The Knowledge Of The Holy**, p. 5).

As the church of our Lord battles to maintain its New Testament identity in a pluralistic and denominational society, it is all the more important that we possess a proper conception of God. Misconceptions about the nature of God are the foundation for every religious error in existence today. To cite just one example, the emphasis that “God is love” (1 John 4:8) to the exclusion of recognizing His severity (Rom. 11:22) is the foundation for the erroneous assertion that God is too loving to punish someone for eternity in hell (Matt. 25:46).

Our prayer in sending forth this volume is that it will assist the reader in knowing that God exists, and in gathering an accurate picture of the nature and attributes of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

--B. J. Clarke

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CHAPTER 1

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

PAUL MEACHAM, JR.

G*OD DOES EXIST!!!* God does exist, but not just because man says He does. Nor would He cease to exist if we denied Him. Rather, God's existence is a **fact** that is both ascertainable and provable, a **truth**, and therefore not dependent upon man's realization or acceptance.

When man fails to acknowledge the existence of God, he does not diminish God's existence, but his own. By denying Him as our Creator, Sustainer, and King, man falsely relegates himself to an accidental, momentary blob of worthless stuff having neither direction nor destination. With so much at stake, it behooves us to give careful, focused, consideration to this matter.

The Assignment

It is my assigned task to bring to our remembrance both the fact that God exists, and some of the proofs that manifest His existence to us. To accomplish this we will consider: 1) Some of the misconceptions about God, 2) The logical import of a continuing misunderstanding of God, 3) Some proofs that the God of the Bible does exist, and 4) Our required and reasonable response in light of these proofs. As we will later note, the very fact that man can consider, make, receive, research, prepare, and present this assignment is in itself a compelling proof for the

existence of God.

A Definition

Due to the many and varied ideas man has concocted about God, it would be prudent to define what is meant by “God” in this chapter. By “God” we mean the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Creator declared to us through the Bible as being: 1) without beginning or end, 2) comprised of three persons, and 3) without limits in His love for us, the creature. It is not the goal of this lesson to prove or defend this definition. However, that it is a true and defensible definition is borne out by the subsequent chapters of this book.

Some Misconceptions About God

A few years ago a country song became popular by observing that many people were, “*Looking For Love In All The Wrong Places.*” Not only has man chosen the wrong paths along which to pursue love, but he has been equally reckless and misguided in his search for God. Rather than turning to the inspired missive, man now turns to literature, art, entertainment, and philosophy. While there can be profit in a study of these disciplines, they make poor reference material upon which to base a study of God.

There is absolutely no agreement among poets and story writers regarding God. By delving into their ideas about God, one can draw any picture he wants of our Father. Some would have us believe God doesn’t exist at all. R. J. Hollingdale, the British author, said, “...perhaps we shall have to colonize the stars before it is finally borne in upon us that God is not out there.”¹ Other writers, like D. H. Lawrence, portray God as, “...only a great imaginative experience”² thereby reducing Him to no more than what I feel and remember about life. Even when the possible existence of God is granted, the image drawn is

more often than not a warped and distorted visage of evil instead of good. Note the words of Georges Bataille. “For being God means that one is in harmony with all that is, including the worst. The existence of the worst evils is unimaginable unless God willed them.”³ Human writers, left to their own devices, have demonstrated the ability to take us from one end of the spectrum to the other in their descriptions of God and never light on the simple truth.

The world of art does no better. Pablo Picasso adopted a very cavalier attitude toward God in declaring, “God is really only another artist. He invented the giraffe, the elephant, and the cat. He has no real style. He just keeps on trying other things.”⁴ For Picasso this may have been intended as a compliment toward God. However, it still demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of the powerful Creator of all. Still, Picasso’s observation is at least inoffensive. Some have not been so kind in their assessment of the Almighty. Andre Breton, the French painter, is quoted as saying, “Everything that is doddering, squint-eyed, vile, polluted, and grotesque is summoned up for me in that one word: God!”⁵ I can not imagine how man could ever speak words more blasphemous and damnable than these. It is clear that the world of art offers us no better guidance than literature did.

Do we turn to the philosophers and entertainers? The answer must clearly be **no!!!** The French playwright Alfred Jarry defined God as, “... the tangential point between zero and infinity.”⁶ What? You don’t understand what that means? That is precisely the point. It means absolutely nothing. Jarry didn’t know God, didn’t know about God, and therefore was not able to speak to others about Him. Luis Bunuel, the Spanish filmmaker, published an autobiography in 1983, the year of his death. In his biography, he arrogantly boasts, “If someone were to prove to me—right this minute—that God, in all his

luminousness, exists, it wouldn't change a single aspect of my behavior."⁷ If this could be said because one was already living a life of obedient service, that would be wonderful. Bunuel, however, didn't even believe God existed.

So where do we go to learn about God? Some would shout, "We must turn to religion to truly know God!!" While this sounds like a good answer on the surface, a study of the various religions of the world only tends to lead us in ever-confusing circles. Some teach God as a mean, angry, Master who must be constantly appeased with gifts and trinkets or He will unleash His wrath on us.

Some represent a powerless figurehead who merely sits on His throne and smilingly nods as life hurries on below Him. Some preach a God that exudes a sticky sweet form of all-encompassing "love." Believing that no one could possibly live in such a way as to raise His ire, they flit through life willfully oblivious that the justice of God will one day require an accounting of "...the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Even in the church of our Lord, God is often treated like a "lucky charm," of sorts. When things are rough and we are scared, **then** we reach for Him, hoping that we will find comfort and reassurance. The other 360 days a year, many go through life making little true acknowledgement that God is there, and still rules in the affairs of men. So we see that just turning to "religion" is not the answer either.

The right answer lies in recognizing that only through the Bible has God chosen to totally manifest Himself. Oh yes, man can look at the creation of God and know that some "higher power" must exist. But only through His revealed will, the Bible, can we learn Who that power is and what He requires of us.

The Logical Import Of A Continuing Misunderstanding Of God

Seeing the misconceptions with which many view God, we should be all the more impressed with the great need for more serious study of the Godhead. At the same time we are forced to ask, "Where will a continued misunderstanding of God lead?" While I possess no crystal ball, and it wouldn't help if I did, we can know the answer to this question. All we have to do is examine where we are headed, and we will see where we will end.

Where we are headed is clearly manifested in three particular areas. Man exhibits an increasing lack of love and respect for God. Man rejects in wholesale fashion the restraints placed upon him by refusing to acknowledge the standard of right and wrong. Man has distorted the God-given value system until he has perverted the relationship between man and God, man and the animal, and man and man.

Lack Of Love And Respect For God

Failing to understand and accept that God is all the Bible declares Him to be, man re-creates God in his own image. This done, man steps back to admire his handiwork and declares God unworthy of love and devotion. Having so declared, it is not surprising that man soon shows no respect for any authority and demonstrates an increasingly cavalier attitude toward worship.

Simple and casual observation is sufficient to show us the ever-decreasing respect Americans have for authority. Our government no longer pays even lip service to God. The man-on-the-street no longer respects the government he is in part responsible for electing. Husbands and wives no longer respect their vows of marriage or their responsibilities to their children. We then sit back in shocked wonder because little Johnny

and Susie are ill behaved, disrespectful, short-tempered, and sometimes even abusive to their parents and other adults. All of these ills stem directly from man's refusal to acknowledge God and His Will as sovereign.

Even in the religious world we see a dramatic decline in respect for God. This is probably best demonstrated in man's continuing devaluation of worship. While it is true that great edifices are being built, it is also true that fewer and fewer people are coming to worship in them. Some "churches" have instituted drive-through religion so they will not make too great a demand on the part of those who still feel a compunction to make regular oblations to God. The buildings that are filled on Sundays are, to a great extent, those where almost all pretense to worship has been set aside, and the masses are openly and shamelessly entertained to their hearts content. In the last twenty years the Lord's church has shown that we are not immune to this "make me feel good" style of religion. In fact, in some areas of the country, the things happening in buildings that say "Church Of Christ" on the outside, are enough to make even some of the denominations blush.

Rejection Of A Standard Of Right And Wrong

Going hand in hand with a loss of respect for God is a loss of respect for His Word. Man hasn't stopped there, however. In rejecting the Bible, man creates, in the place of authority, a vacuum. To fill the void, man elevates himself and his feelings to a place of ruling prominence. That this is true is clearly seen in the way man promotes "situational ethics" and the many religious divisions in the world today.

"Situational ethics" are no ethics at all. "Situational ethics" is the idea that there is no discernible standard of right and wrong. It claims that any action, no matter how heinous, might be justified by the circumstances or

by the intent of the person. Even among those purporting “situational ethics” there is great disagreement. Usually this centers around what **standard** of thought should be used to determine the **best** course of action in certain situations. Some believe one should act in the best interest of the greatest number of people. Others claim that “what is best” is not discernible, so we should just do what is best for us. Still others teach that it doesn’t matter what you choose to do, as long as you don’t hurt someone else. In each of these positions, some man has put himself in the position of deciding what is **right, better, best, greater** or **hurtful**. Everything the supporters of “situational ethics” search for has been supplied. Peter tell us that God has, “...given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3).

That man has rejected God’s standard is easily seen in the thousands of religions scattered across the world. It doesn’t matter what you want to believe or practice, some group claiming to be religious will embrace and accept you. In recent years this has expanded to include those desiring to openly worship Satan. Even “witches” have been accepted by mainstream America as a religion, and have claimed for themselves Halloween as their holy day. [As chance would have it, today, channel 24 out of Memphis, TN, aired a repeat of a local issues program first aired in late October, 1997. The lead story was about a new policy at the local animal shelters forbidding the adoption of black cats for a period of fifteen days before and during Halloween. This policy was deemed necessary to eliminate the adoption of black cats that were being used as sacrifices to Satan and ingredients in “witch’s” potions. PDM 5-16-98] None of this diversity and division is possible without first rejecting the Bible as **the standard** in all matters.

Distorted Value System

It is not possible for man to misunderstand God, yet properly understand the value of man, made in the image of God. This has led to a distortion of the value God has placed upon man. In leaving God's standard, man has devalued his soul and, at the same time, overvalued his wisdom. While these seem to be opposite reactions, they are nevertheless true.

Many today regard man as no better than the animals. There are more animal shelters in America than there are shelters for battered women. Yet the number of women beaten each year increases. Most claim they stay where they are because they have no place else to go. A growing number of Americans object to the use of animals in laboratory testing. At the same time, they lobby Congress to allow the very type of testing that will make it even more lucrative for doctors to perform abortions. It has been wryly observed by more than one rabbit hunter that a man would likely spend more time in prison for killing a bald eagle than for killing a man. All of these perverted positions come about when man forgets that he possesses a soul made in the image of God. The psalmist reminds us, "...I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." (Psm. 139:14).

Concurrent with man's decisions that an unborn child may be cut out of his mother's body and thrown into the garbage, that the spotted owl and the snail darter deserve more protection than children in schools, and that the elderly may now have a doctor assist them into eternity (so they won't be a burden to their family), it has been concluded, "**Man Is God!!!**" Not only has man's overinflated ego rejected God's wisdom, but it has adopted man as God. George Bernard Shaw, a playwright of some note, explained it this way:

To me the sole hope of human salvation lies in teaching Man to regard himself as an experiment in the realization of God, to regard his hands as God's hand, his brain as God's brain, his purpose as God's purpose. He must regard God as a helpless Longing, which *longed* him into existence by its desperate need for an executive organ.⁸

Notice that Shaw affirms that God's hand, mind, and purpose are **not** to become ours, but that we are to consider **our** hands, mind and purpose as **being** God's. What unmitigated arrogance!

When I view myself as God, and my fellow man as nothing more than an animal, I become a ruthless creature. As "God" I feel no compunction about doing anything necessary to please myself. If my fellow man is no more than an animal, I feel equally free to do to him anything that I decide will be better for me. Rebelling against the existence of God or accepting His existence in only a limited sense has led to all the above ills and can only take us farther along the same path.

Some Proofs Of God's Existence

Now, let us turn our attention to the meat of the assignment, some of the proofs of God's existence. It will be my goal to appeal to the common sense that God gave us, and to apply simple reasoning and logic in plain terms. It is my greatest desire that any child of twelve would be able to follow, understand, and use the following pages to prove the existence of God.

In talking about **proving** God's existence, some clarification of terms is necessary. There is a sense in which it is not possible to **prove** God's existence. One can not hold God in his hand, place Him on a scale, measure Him with a tape, and then declare that God's

existence has been proven by these means. However, we can, in the legal sense, prove that God does exist. If **evidence** can be produced that **demands** the existence of the God of the Bible, then one can prove God's existence even without the ability to weigh and measure Him. It is in this sense that we now determine to **prove** that God does exist.

I Am Here

I Am Here! At this very moment I am sitting in a chair at my desk tapping away at the keyboard of my computer. "What does that have to do with proving God's existence?," some may ask. Here's the point: the **fact** that I am here is just that, a **fact**. I can be held, measured, and weighed. My presence, however, is more than just evidence of **my existence**. It is the beginning of a path that leads to the unmistakable conclusion that **God must exist**. Let's see how.

I am here, but I didn't put myself here. That is, I didn't create myself. There was a time when I didn't exist. Some time in 1962, I was conceived and had a beginning. I was then born in 1963. The point is that I did not **cause** myself to be here. Someone else **caused** me to exist. We know that the "someones" who **caused** my beginning, who brought me into existence, were my parents. Knowing this forces me to ask, "Who caused my parents to exist?," "Who caused my grandparents to exist?," "Who caused their parents to exist?," and so on. It is easy to see that eventually we get all the way back to the very first mother and father.

How did the very first mother and father come into existence? Every person must ask and answer this all-important question. Man on every continent and from every tribe has spent a lifetime searching for the answer. When man seeks an answer, man gets an answer. The

problem is that the answers have been so varied and bizarre that they have become the foundations for “fairy tales.” These wild and laughable explanations have led some to believe that we can not answer the question. Others have concluded that the only credible answers are those coming from geologists, archaeologists, biologists, anthropologists, or some other kind of “ologists.” However, even these people of great learning and experience can neither agree with each other nor with the evidence uncovered in their quests for knowledge. So, we come right back to where we started. How did the very first mother and father come into existence?

There are only three possible answers. (1) The first mother and father always existed; (2) There was a time when they didn’t exist but they **caused** themselves to exist or (3) There was a time when they didn’t exist and someone else **caused** them to exist. Since there are no other possibilities for the existence of the first mother and father, let’s look at these three and see which one is true.

Is it possible that the first mother and father always existed? The answer is clearly **no!!** Everything that takes up space and can be known by touch, taste, smell, sound, or sight is called matter. There is a law in science known as the second law of thermodynamics which, simply stated, says that energy, as it is used, is changed from a usable form into an unusable form. This means that the entire universe is slowly winding down like a toy that must be wound up to run. If it is winding down, there must be a time when it was completely wound up. That point, the time when it was completely wound up, is the beginning of the universe. Since the first mother and father are part of the universe and made of matter, they, like all matter, had to have a beginning. If they had a beginning, it is **not** possible that they always existed.

What about the second of our possible answers?

Since we know they had to have had a beginning, could the very first mother and father have **caused** their own existence. Of course not!! What a ridiculous idea!!! Two things would have to be true for the first mother and father to **cause** their own beginning. First, they would have to have the **ability** to **cause** their own existence. Second, they would have to have existed, before they existed, in order to **cause** themselves to begin existing. Clearly both of these things are impossible. By definition, one can not exist before he exists.

Also, since we know that everything reproduces after its own kind (apple trees give apples, not peaches; dogs have puppies, not hamsters) we know that we as humans had to have human parents. Our parents are human because their parents were human, and so on, all the way back to the first mother and father. If we as humans are not able to **cause** ourselves to exist, that means that the first mother and father, being human, could not have **caused** their own existence. We see then that it is not possible that the first mother and father **caused** themselves to exist.

We are left with only one choice. **There must have been a time when the very first mother and father did not exist, and someone caused them to begin existing.** Since someone else **caused** the first mother and father to exist, they, and all humans who have come after them, are referred to as an **effect**. I have been stressing the word, “**caused**,” because there is a rule that says, “Every **effect** must have an adequate **cause**.” Now that we know that man, and, by extension, matter and the universe, are an **effect**, all we have to do is identify the adequate **cause**.

As we begin the search for our **cause** let’s pay special attention to the word, “adequate.” Not every **cause** is adequate to explain every **effect**. For example, if on a

breezy day you see a car in a roadside ditch, it is not logical to assume the breeze pushed the car into the ditch. A breeze is not an **adequate cause** for the **effect**. If the radio announced that tornadoes were spotted in the area, and you found a car in the ditch along with broken trees and downed power lines, it would be perfectly logical to assume that the wind pushed the car into the ditch. A tornado would be an **adequate cause** for the **effect**. When we look at man, the **effect**, we must find something **adequate** to have **caused** him. In fact, looking at the **effect** will tell us much about the **cause**.

While taking a closer look at man, we notice four things that are obvious. Man is alive, intelligent, moral, and intricately designed. Since man is an **effect** and requires an **adequate cause**, we should seek a **cause** that is likewise alive, intelligent, moral, and able to design. Any potential **cause** considered that does not have these four attributes is either not a **cause**, or at least not an **adequate cause** for man. Not only must man's **cause** possess all these traits, but man's **cause** must be greater than man in all these areas. It is not possible for the thing created to be greater than the creator. Since man is the created, his **cause** must be greater than he.

Much of the world, including the part that denies God, would probably agree with most of our reasoning thus far. However, this is where we part company. Most of the world proposes, for our consideration, that man's **cause** is the long drawn out series of accidents and mutations that continued by blind chance and dumb luck to produce man. They claim there is no Creator, no plan, no intent, and no guidance involved, just millions and millions of mistakes over billions and billions of years that just happened to produce the most complicated and intricately detailed creation ever known. Is this possible? Does evolution satisfy the requirements? Is it possible

for evolution to **cause** living, intelligent, moral, carefully designed man? Can evolution be an **adequate cause** of the greatest **effect** ever? Let's see.

I Am Alive

Man is alive. In this we find little opposition. But, when did life begin? Is evolution **adequate** to bring about life? The answer is no!!! That life only comes from the living is obvious, demonstrable, and inherently reasonable. In fact, scientists, even those who reject God and embrace evolution, freely accept in every area of science, that life can not come from that which is non-living. In science this is referred to as the Law of Biogenesis. The only exception scientists (not all, but a great number) make, comes when they try to explain how man and the universe came into being.

In simple terms the explanation usually goes something like this. There was a time when there was a teeny tiny speck of something that was **dead**. Through a complicated series of accidents and mishaps the **dead** speck eventually became **alive** and expanded into what we now know as the universe. Although the word "science" comes from the Latin, "*scientia*," and means, "**to know**," the most common answer evolutionists give is, "**I don't know**." How can life come from non-living? **I don't know**. Where did the teeny tiny speck of almost nothing come from? **I don't know**. How did something so tiny expand into the entire universe? **I don't know**. Oh, it's true that some scientists promote various theories, but they are just that -- theories. There is nothing wrong with theories except that they are worthless when experimentation **proves** them to be false. In fact, if we limit the evolutionist to what is **known**, his own research often **disproves** his theory.

What the research of the scientist does prove is that

evolution is a completely *inadequate cause* for any living **effect**. Since man and the universe are certainly alive, and experimentation proves that all life comes only from that which is living, and evolution, by its own definition, requires life to come from the non-living, **we know** that evolution **can not** be the **cause** for living man.

I Am Intelligent

Man is intelligent. Not only is man intelligent, but every cell of the universe screams out, "I am a testimony to the vast intelligence of my **cause**." In their book, *The Case for the Existence of God*, brothers Thompson and Jackson reference, "an article written for *Encyclopaedia Britannica*," by noted evolutionist Carl Sagan. In his article, Dr. Sagan explains that a single cell contains approximately one trillion bits of information. "...Dr. Sagan then noted that if one were to count every letter in every word of every book in the world's largest library (over ten million volumes), the final tally would be approximately a trillion letters."⁹ We then learn it has been estimated that man is comprised of approximately 100,000,000,000,000 (100 trillion) cells.¹⁰ By simple multiplication we can conservatively estimate the amount of information stored in the human body at 1×10^{24} bits. Written out in expanded form that is a one followed by 24 zeros.

What is the point? The point is simply this. Dr. Sagan, one of the preeminent evolutionists of our lifetime, finds within a single cell about the same amount of information as that in the largest of all libraries. A single human body possesses 100 trillion times that amount of information. While Dr. Sagan would freely admit each book in the library was the product of an intelligence, he and other evolutionists then tell us that man is the product of **mindless, arbitrary** evolution. No one would ever

accept blind chance as an **adequate cause** for a single book in a library. Yet evolution, by definition, unintelligent and without direction, **is** touted as an adequate **cause** for intelligent man. Since man and his universe, by their great stores of information, demand that they have an intelligent **cause**, and evolution, by its very foundations, claims to be unintelligent, **we know** that evolution can not be an adequate **cause** for intelligent man.

I Am Moral

Man is moral. It is within man and only within man that we find an interest in right and wrong. Some reject the assertion that man is moral and point to the cruel deeds of some evildoer as proof. However, that man is moral can be proved. Even those who are so callused they no longer care how they treat others, provide proof of the moral nature of man. No matter how cold and heartless one becomes in his actions toward others, the morals within him will still come to the surface when another wrongs him. He will stand and deliver eloquently on the subject of right and wrong, good and evil, just and unjust, virtue and vice. That man is a moral creature is also demonstrated when those who reject God go about trying to establish their own ethical code and thereby manifest man's inherent propensity to acknowledge right and wrong.

The import of this observation to our discussion is that man, the moral **effect**, must have an **adequate moral cause**. Evolution, by its own claims is the very opposite. Evolution claims that there is no rule but the rule of might. Survival belongs only to the fittest. What's yours is yours only until I am strong enough to take it away. It is then mine only while I am strong enough to hold on to it. Every plank of the evolution platform touts the weakness and inefficiency of any standard other than, "Take care of

number one!!” Yet man still honors him who exhibits sacrifice, compassion, generosity, and attention to duty even at great cost to himself. According to evolution, moral man should be the weakest of all creatures, subject to the stronger amoral animals, and destined to soon disappear from the face of the earth. However, while inferior to many animals in strength and speed, man rules the planet and dominates the animals, not in spite of his morals, but partly because of them. Evolution can not be an *adequate cause* for moral man.

I Am Intricately Designed

Every aspect of man manifests a carefully detailed design. This may be the strongest of all arguments against evolution and for the existence of the God of the Bible. In fact, the complexity of the human body often serves as the pattern for man to emulate when making his own designs. Yet even when man pours all his efforts and collective skills into a project, he still can not even duplicate the fineness with which he is himself designed.

I have spent the last twelve years, 1986-1998, making a living working in electronics. Part of my education and experience is in robotics. In robotics the ability of a machine to put a nut on a bolt is a milestone. To be able to sense how tightly to hold the nut without dropping or crushing it, to sense where the bolt is, to sense when the nut and the bolt are lined up, to know which direction to turn the nut to tighten or loosen, and to be able to sense when the threads have taken hold without cross-threading it, is a monumental feat of robotics. To put it in perspective, a robot capable of performing such a task possesses more computing power than the entire Apollo spacecraft that traveled to the moon. Even then, the robot will not be able to complete the task every time. If the wrong size nut or bolt is accidentally provided, the robot will fail even

though everything else is working according to design. I have always found it interesting that when we want to describe a clumsy-handed man, we say, "He can't even put a nut on a bolt."

No one, not even the evolutionist, will deny that such a robot is the product of a concentrated and purposeful design. Yet they quickly and loudly claim that the man who designed the robot is the product of accidents. To the lesser, evolutionists ascribe a design and purpose, and to the greater, they deny such. To be consistent in their thinking an evolutionist would have to walk into a plant where such a robot was at work and quickly, loudly, and defiantly pronounce, "The robot was not designed. It is the product of a series of accidents that occurred when spare parts were lying around. The parts then flew together in just the right way to enable it to put a nut on a bolt. Isn't it amazing that something like that could happen without a design." If that scene strikes you as ridiculous then consider how ridiculous it is to either deny man's design or try to ascribe it to a procession of accidents.

Much could be said regarding man's design just by noticing the function of the human body. Every cell, tissue, organ, and system bears the mark of its designer. In this discussion, however, we will look at only one more, blood. My twelve years with robotics have been in the field of blood cell analyzers. I repair them. One very small part of our blood system is the platelets. In simple terms the platelets are responsible for helping the blood to clot. The process by which the walls of our blood vessels break down and are repaired goes on 24 hours a day. Without our thought or awareness, the platelets, along with other things, have been repairing the blood vessels when they spring leaks since before we were born. Most of this blood vessel repair happens inside the body and, therefore, out of sight. If it didn't happen, we would bleed to death

without even cutting ourselves.

One might say, “I thought blood clots in the body were dangerous, that they cause strokes.” This is true under some circumstances. That is one of the amazing things about this process called hemostasis. The proper clotting must take place to avoid bleeding to death and we can not have too much clotting or the danger of a stroke is very real. This all-important balance is automatically maintained so well that most of us are unaware that it even takes place. Usually we never hear about any of this until some medical condition makes it necessary for a doctor to put us on a “blood thinner” medicine. From that point on, this vital balance must be continually monitored and medication adjusted to ensure our safety. Even the processes our body carries on involuntarily are often beyond our ability to duplicate.

Even with all our knowledge and skill our attempts at replacement body parts is remedial at best. My mother, facing knee replacement, is told she can expect about 12-15 years service from the new joint. The original is 64 years old.

The artificial heart seemed like a great idea but its success was limited at best. Doctors have concluded that almost every patient would be much better off with a transplanted heart (closer to original equipment) than the best of artificial pumps. The most advanced prosthetic limbs pale in comparison to even the most awkward and clumsy among us.

When the best designers and millions of dollars of research come up so far short, compared to the original item, how can we then conclude the original is not the product of design and a **master designer** at that. Evolution, claiming the absence of design and designer, certainly **can not** be an adequate **cause** for finely designed man or his universe.

Only God Could Have Caused Man

Now we come to the end of our path to proof. Since man is alive, intelligent, moral, and complexly designed, only the God of the Bible stands as an **adequate cause**. Alive, and the giver of life (Gen. 2:7, Eccl. 12:5-7), infinitely intelligent (Psm. 147:5), the standard of morality (Psm. 119:142), and the master designer (Job 33:4, Psm. 139:14), our Creator perfectly possesses all that is needed for evidence and reason to proclaim Him as our one and true **cause**.

I Am Here So God Does Exist

Why place such great emphasis on the existence of man when our assignment is the existence of God? Why have we taken such great pains to examine the traits of man? Why have we labored to dispel the myth of evolution? Here's the point. Man exists. Man could only have been made by God. Therefore the existence of God is as sure as the existence of man. No one can question God's existence without first explaining an alternate adequate **cause** for man.

Why do intelligent and learned men cling so tightly to the laughably ridiculous tenets of evolution? Because, as inadequate as it is, evolution is their best alternative to God. They must either cling in blind faith to evolution or accept God and subject themselves to His will. Once again:

...this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matt. 13:15).

The Bible Tells Me So

Is this all there is in defense of God's existence? Not

by a long shot. What is offered here can not even generously be referred to as the “hem of the garment,” or the “tip of the iceberg.” So far we have not even made mention of all the Bible says regarding God’s existence. Some would say the Bible can not be used to prove God’s existence. It is often referred to as “circular reasoning,” or “begging your argument.” However, the Bible **can** be used to prove God’s existence. If it can be proved that the Bible is beyond human manufacture, then the Bible **can** be used to prove God’s existence. (As it is beyond the scope of this lesson to offer this proof, the reader is referred to *The Bible None Like It*, Memphis School of Preaching Lectures.) In fact, as the Bible is beyond human manufacture, it can not be a human declaration in favor of God and must be acknowledged as a divine declaration. It is a divine declaration that by its very existence proves of the existence of God.

Time and space do not allow us to explore all the Bible says to prove God’s existence. So let us be satisfied with the fact that, through the Bible, God’s claim to existence is clear and plain. God begins His Revelation, “In the beginning God,” (Gen. 1:1). At the time of Moses we see God explaining Himself as the “I AM.” (Exod. 3:14), thereby claiming Himself as the **standard** against which existence is measured. At the time of Christ’s earthly travels we see nothing had changed as, “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

Summation

Nature declares the existence of God. The Bible declares God’s existence and explains Him to us. The man who examines the evidence and deals with it honestly declares the existence of God. Who denies the existence of God? Only those who want more than anything else to

believe that He doesn't exist. At the beginning of this lesson we noticed that God does exist, but not just because man says He does. Nor would He cease to exist if we denied Him. This is still true.

It seems only fitting that having proven the existence of God we close with the words of the Father as He completed His creative work that brought us about:

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. (Gen. 1:29-31)

Endnotes

1 R. J. Hollingdale, **Thomas Mann: A Critical Study, Ch. 8** (1971), quoted in **The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations** is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

2 E. McDonald, **Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence**, (1936), quoted in **The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations** is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

3 **Bataille, Feydeau, and God**. from a 1957 interview with Marguerite Duras, reprinted in 1984 as **Outside: Selected Writings**, quoted in **The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations** is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

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4 Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, **Life with Picasso**, (1964), quoted in **The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations** is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

5 André Breton, footnote from **Surrealism and Painting**, (1928), quoted in **The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations** is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

6 Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor, **The Selected Works of Alfred Jarry**, (1965), quoted in **The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations** is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

7 Luis Bunuel, **My Last Sigh**, Ch. 15, (1983), quoted in **The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations** is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

8 George Bernard Shaw, **Collected Letters**, Vol. 2, (1972), from a letter dated August, 19 1909, and addressed to Lady Gregory, quoted in, **The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations** is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

9 Bert Thompson, Ph.D. and Wayne Jackson, M.A., **The Case for the Existence of God**, (Apologetics Press, Inc., 1996), 26

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CHAPTER 2

VITAL QUESTIONS ABOUT KNOWING GOD

B. J. CLARKE

Introduction

IN PREPARATION FOR PUBLISHING a book entitled *What Do We Mean When We Say God*, a number of Americans were asked to provide a definition of God. The following quotations represent just two of the scores of responses which were published:

God is a very personal thing—which does not mean that He is a person. It means that each person has the opportunity to devise his own notion of what is God to him. That's sacred. None of us has the right to take that away from anyone else—which is to say that if we do, we are transgressing on something pretty heavy.¹

The feeling I get from the word 'God' is one of love. I think He is a very different kind of being, a kind, gentle thing—in a way, Santa Claus comes to mind. I know Santa Claus is not real, but if he was, God would have the exact personality of him.²

Along these same lines, C. S. Lewis reminisced of speaking on the subject of theology only to have a man

stand up in the midst of his message and say:

I've no use for that stuff. But, mind you, I'm a religious man too. I *know* there's a God. I've *felt* Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that's just why I don't believe all your neat little dogmas and formulas about Him. To anyone who's met the real thing they all seem so petty and pedantic and unreal.³

The above quotations possess a common thread: all those quoted based their conception of God upon their **own** personal and subjective feelings. Not one of them appealed to any kind of objective standard whereby we may come to know the true God. Is the knowledge of God really all that elastic and flexible, or are there some concrete and unalterable facts about God which must be agreed upon by all who would claim to know Him? Before addressing some specific questions about knowing God, perhaps it would be helpful to point out that our generation is certainly not the first to make a failing grade in the department of knowing God.

When ordered to release the children of Israel, Pharoah emphatically declared, "**I know not the Lord**, neither will I let Israel go" (Exod. 5:2, all emphasis mine throughout, BJC). After the death of Joshua and his generation, "there arose another generation after them, which **knew not the Lord**" (Judg. 2:10). Likewise, the wicked sons of Eli "**knew not the Lord**" (1 Sam. 2:12). Job described the wicked men of his generation, who said unto God, "Depart from us; for **we desire not the knowledge of thy ways**" (Job 21:14). This same disposition is portrayed when the Psalmist depicts the wicked saying, "**How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?**" (Psm. 73:11).

As is the case today, the problem of not knowing God was not limited to the secular arena. In describing some of the priests, God said, “they that handle the law **knew me not**” (Jer. 2:8). Jeremiah described some who affirmed that the Lord liveth although they lived as if He did not. Jeremiah labeled these men as foolish “for **they know not the way of the Lord**” (Jer. 5:4). Of His people, God said, “they proceed from evil to evil, and **they know not me...through deceit they refuse to know me**” (Jer. 9:3, 6). Hosea also portrayed Israel as defiled when he wrote:

They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and **they have not known the Lord** (Hos. 5:4).

Man’s ignorance of God is no less evident in the New Testament. Although Jesus made the world, and came into the world, “**the world knew him not**” (John 1:10; 1 John 3:1). Jesus told the Jews who claimed to know the Father, “**yet ye have not known him**; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying” (John 8:55). When the blind man asked the Pharisees if they wanted to become disciples of Jesus they replied, “We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is” (John 9:29). Furthermore, Jesus told His apostles that they would be persecuted and killed by those who thought they were doing God a service. He then added, “And these things will they do unto you, because **they have not known the Father, nor me**” (John 16:2-3).

After noting that there is no excuse for not knowing that which may be known of God (Rom. 1:18-20), Paul observed of some that “when they knew God, they glorified him not as God” (Rom. 1:21). In fact, “**they did not like**

to retain God in their knowledge” (Rom. 1:28). Paul also admonished the Corinthians, “Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for **some have not the knowledge of God**: I speak this to your shame” (1 Cor. 15:34).

Unfortunately, the above passages all too accurately depict our current culture. Therefore, it is important that we ask and answer the following questions: what does it really mean to know God, and if there is an objective standard whereby God may be known, what is it and where is it found? Is it really possible to know God? If so, how? Just as importantly, what the blessings of knowing God? What are the consequences of not knowing Him? It is to these questions that we direct our attention.

Why Is It Important To Make Sure That We Know God?

1. Because God says that knowing Him is more important than wisdom, might or riches. The importance of knowing God is captured in Jeremiah 9:23-24, wherein Jehovah declares:

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, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

The most important knowledge in the world is that which pertains to God Almighty. We agree that “what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”⁴ It is true that “the

mightiest thought the mind can entertain is the thought of God, and the weightiest word in any language is its word for God.”⁵ Perhaps no one, outside of the inspired writers, has so eloquently explained the importance of knowing God than author J. I. Packer:

The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place, and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do not know about God. Disregard the study of God and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder though life blindfold, [sic] as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.⁶

2. Because so many misconceptions about God exist, both within and without the church. Man has a tendency to create God in man’s own image. As finite beings we tend to view the infinite God in terms of our own finite limitations. That is why God said unto man, “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself” (Psm. 50:21).

The plethora of false views regarding God render it necessary for us to make certain that we believe the right things about God. As noted in the foreword of this book, misconceptions about God are the foundation for every false doctrine. You can be certain that those who teach the false doctrine of “cheap grace” are deficient in their understanding of the severity of God (Rom. 11:22). Likewise, those who always and **only** preach hell and damnation have failed to appreciate properly the love of God.

3. Because our eternal life depends upon it. Jesus said, “And this is life eternal, **that they might know thee** the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom

thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Knowing God is the key to knowing where we came from, who we are, whom we ought to be like, how we ought to live, and for what we can hope in this life, and beyond.

Is It Possible To Know God?

In the midst of hurling unfounded accusations against Job, one of Job’s friends, Zophar the Naamathite, asked:

Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as 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 (Job 11:7-9).

Later, Elihu, who had listened patiently to the discussion between Job and his friends, broke his silence and affirmed, “Behold, God is great, and **we know him not**, neither can the number of his years be searched out” (Job 36:26). In the very closing words of his speech he echoed this same sentiment: “Touching the Almighty, **we cannot find him out**: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict” (Job 37:23). The Psalmist declared the greatness of God to be unsearchable (Psm. 145:3). There is no searching of His understanding (Isa. 40:28). Paul wrote:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? (Rom. 11:33-34).

Regarding the subject of God, the following quotation

captures the essence of the preceding passages:

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 plumb 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...⁷

We should hasten to address some obvious questions: Does God desire for us to know Him? The answer is yes. Are the ways of God unsearchable? Yes. Is the infinite God beyond our finite comprehension? Yes and no. While it is impossible for us to completely fathom the majestic nature and infinite ways of God, we **can** come to know and understand Him insofar as He has revealed Himself unto us. Otherwise, what difference does it make if God exists, but is so far above our grasp that we can know absolutely nothing about Him? If we can know nothing at all about God, then for all practical purposes, we are left as if there is no God.

How Has God Made Himself Known?

Since we cannot read minds, we can only know about someone what they choose to reveal by their words/actions. If someone wishes to do so they can "put on a mask" and fail to reveal the truth about who they really are. In a similar way we are dependent upon the willingness of God

to reveal Himself if we would really know anything about Him. Fortunately, God has revealed Himself in both a general and special way.

The General Revelation of God

Paul argues that some things may be known of God by examining His creation. God has not left Himself without witness, but rather has done us good by giving us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, the glad result being that our stomachs are filled with food (Acts 14:17). Furthermore, Paul wrote of God:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly see, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

In his outstanding commentary on Romans, brother James Boyd comments on this verse:

“The things that are made” means the realm of nature and the creation. Since the creation men could have looked upon what has been created and concluded there is a Supreme Being; there is a God of power and divinity. It has been stated and justly so, “Nature declares **God is**, and the Bible declares **Who He is**. The Psalmist says in Psalm 19:1, “The heaven declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork.” I am aware that some have stated that one can know nothing of God, not even His existence, without the Bible, but this passage refutes that. But the creation declares His glory and by implication His existence. We certainly cannot know much about God through what God

has created, but the investigation of the creation itself prods one to believe there must be God.⁸

The Special Revelation Of God

It is extremely crucial to note that natural revelation is insufficient to reveal all that we desire and need to know about God. The beauty and foliage of a tree might convince me of the existence of a Supreme Architect, but I could not watch a leaf fall to the ground and thereby conclude that such an Architect loved me enough to send His Son to die for me and rescue me from sin. In fact, I wouldn't even know that the Son of God existed and that I was a sinner were it not for a special revelation from God. Nature alone does not reveal all that God is, nor was it ever intended to do so.

The world through its wisdom “knew not God” (1 Cor. 1:21). It takes a special revelation from God in order to know God. Hence, the question arises: Has God chosen to reveal the specifics about His nature and His will for man, and if He has done so, how has He done so? Yes, God has chosen to reveal Himself unto mankind and He has manifested Himself in different ways at different times of Bible history. In the Patriarchal age, He revealed His will to the family heads who, in turn, passed that will on down to their descendants. He revealed Himself unto Moses via the burning bush (Exod. 3).

On many occasions God made Himself known by miraculous signs and wonders. He revealed His love for the children of Israel by promising to bring them out from under the burden of Egypt (Exod. 6:6-7; 29:45-46). God performed the plagues in order that Pharaoh might know “that there is none like unto the Lord our God” (Exod. 8:10). He intended for the miraculous provision of bread in the wilderness to demonstrate to the children of Israel His attribute of power (Exod. 16:12). He would prove that

He was the “living God” by driving the Canaanites and surrounding nations out of the land of Canaan (Josh. 3:10). The crossing of the Jordan was designed to demonstrate the same thing (Josh. 4:23-24). Elijah longed for the Lord God to honor his request for fire from heaven in order that the power of God might be exalted above all others (1 Kings 18:36-37). It was after the power of God over leprosy had been demonstrated that Naaman was motivated to say, “Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel” (2 Kings 5:15). Furthermore, God’s power to destroy the enemy nations of Israel and to bring His people safely back to their homeland was often pointed to as proof of His divinity (2 Kings 19:19; Psm. 79:10; Ezek. 28:26; 34:30; 39:21-28; Joel 3:17).

Shall we expect for God to manifest Himself unto us in the same miraculous fashion? The answer is recorded by the Hebrews writer who wrote:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (Heb. 1:1-2).

At the baptism of Jesus, as well as His transfiguration, the Father spoke from heaven and said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). At the mount of transfiguration, even with Moses and Elijah present, the Father singled out His Son and said, “Hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5).

But how shall we hear Him? Should we expect for Him to reveal Himself unto us in an audible voice in the middle of the night? Jesus identified the means by which He would reveal Himself unto mankind. In addition to the life that He lived upon the earth, and the teaching that He did during His earthly ministry, Jesus has

provided us with a revelation of the Father's will. But how did Jesus make known His Father's will?

1. Jesus made known the Father by the life that He lived. When Philip asked Jesus to show the disciples the Father, Jesus replied:

Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works (John 14:9-10).

In other words, if you want to know what God the Father is like, i.e., what attributes He possesses, just look at the life of Jesus. Although no man has ever seen God the Father, Jesus, the only begotten Son, hath declared Him (John 1:18). He represents "the brightness of his glory" and is the "express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3). No wonder Paul affirmed of Jesus, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9).

2. Jesus made known the Father by the things that He taught. Jesus revealed the attributes of the Godhead not only by His life, but also by His lips. Furthermore, the work of Jesus in producing the Holy Scriptures presents us with the most detailed and enduring revelation of the attributes of God. The significance of this written revelation in revealing the mind of God is addressed by Paul in his correspondence to the Corinthians. In contrasting the wisdom of the world and the wisdom from God, Paul wrote:

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in

demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:4-16).

From this classic passage we learn several vital lessons. First, the wisdom of God is described by Paul as a “mystery,” i.e., something not revealed to man in the

past. The rulers of the world, with all of their power and wisdom, did not know the mystery of God's will until it was specially revealed by God through the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:21).

Second, the physical faculties of man alone are incapable of perceiving the will of God. Just as we cannot know what is on the mind of a fellow human being unless he/she tells us, "even so **the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God**" (1 Cor. 2:11).

Therefore, the third observation we would make from this text is that we can know the mind of God only insofar as God reveals it unto us by the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that searches all things, "yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10).

But how has the Holy Spirit revealed the mind of God unto us? It is not in "words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Spirit teacheth: combining spiritual things with spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:13, ASV). In both Old and New Testaments, God has revealed Himself via the words of the Holy Spirit. David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). Also, consider the force of the following passages:

As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; **My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth**, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever (Isa. 59:21).

Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, **all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart**, and hear with thine ears (Ezek. 13:10).

But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. **For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you** (Matt. 10:19-20).

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: **whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak** (John 12:48-50).

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even **the Spirit of truth**, which proceedeth from the Father, **he shall testify of me...**I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: **for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak:** and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: **for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you** (John 14:26; 16:12-14).

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake **as they were moved by the Holy Ghost** (2 Pet. 1:21).

In summary, the combined teaching of the above passages is that the Father made His will known to the Son Who, in turn, revealed it unto the Holy Spirit Who, in

turn, revealed it unto the inspired speaker/writer.

What Does It Mean To Know God?

The word “know” can be used with different shades of meaning. I **know** who the President of the United States is, but I do not **know** the President of the United States. A race car driver might say of a certain vehicle, “I know this car,” meaning, not that he is merely aware of its existence, but rather, that he knows how the car handles. Similarly, there is a difference between knowing that God exists and knowing about His nature and attributes. It should be apparent that knowing God begins with believing the truth about God as it is revealed in Holy Scripture. Why is it so important to be familiar with God’s characteristics in order to truly know Him? Max Anders provides the following excellent answer:

- ◆ If God is not eternal, it means He is not the final answer for the existence of the universe. There is something greater than God.
- ◆ If God is not unchangeable, then He might tell us one thing and do another.
- ◆ If God is not omnipresent, then we might end up in trouble, and God would not be there to help.
- ◆ If God is not omniscient, then He might be ignorant of something terribly important.
- ◆ If God is not omnipotent, then He might want to do something we need but not be able to.⁹

Still yet, one might know that God exists and know of His nature and character and still not know God. For example, an unclean spirit said to Jesus, “Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? **I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God**” (Mark 1:24). The demon knew who

Jesus was but did not **know** Jesus.

An investigation of several passages where the word “know” occurs indicates what is involved in truly knowing God:

And thou, Solomon my son, **know thou the God of thy father**, and **serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind**: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: **if thou seek him, he will be found of thee**; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever (1 Chron. 28:9).

And I will give them an heart to **know me**, that I am the LORD: **and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart** (Jer. 24:7).

Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Howbeit then, **when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods**. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? (Gal. 4:7-9).

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, **Know the Lord: for all shall know me**, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their

iniquities will I remember no more (Heb. 8:10-12).

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:3-5).

The following facts stand out from a study of these passages: (1) Knowing God is equivalent to seeking the one true God and serving Him with a willing and penitent heart, (2) Knowing God is equivalent to having our sins and iniquities forgiven by obeying the commandments of God, and (3) Those who know God are those who are His sons and daughters, heirs of God through Christ.

One thing is certain—it is very fashionable for some today, even religious people, to affirm that they know with God while denying such a claim by their manner of life and conduct. This type of attitude is not new to our age. Isaiah censured the children of Israel for swearing by the name of the Lord and making mention of the God of Israel, “but not in truth, nor in righteousness” (Isa. 48:1). They drew nigh to God with their mouth and lips, but their hearts were far removed from Him, and their concept of God was based upon the precepts of men, not of God (Isa. 29:13). They sought God daily and delighted to approach Him; yet they were serving God according to their will and not His will (Isa. 58:1-5). Ezekiel described people of this same hypocrisy:

Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to

another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and **they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.** And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: **for they hear thy words, but they do them not** (Ezek. 33:30-32).

Paul said of some in his day, “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Tit. 1:16). How descriptive and relevant are these words as they relate to the attitudes and actions of the men and women of our day. Stars and celebrities from the film and music industry have helped to spread the notion that a right relationship with God is enjoyed by simply professing to know him.

I shall never forget catching a glimpse of a music awards program several years ago on television. A popular rock star (known years ago as “Prince”), well known for filthy lyrics and sexually suggestive music videos, was coming to the microphone to express his gratitude for the award he had just received. As he gave his acceptance speech he said, *“I just want to praise God tonight.”* I practically came out of my chair in disbelief. As if he could hear me, I said aloud, *“If you really want to praise God then clean up your music and your life.”*

I was reminded of Titus 1:16 as I listened to his words that night. Here was a man that professed to know God and yet he denied such by his manner of speech and conduct. His promotion of, and participation in, lust and

evil desire reminded me of the “Gentiles which **know not God**” (1 Thess. 4:5). His claim to want to praise God notwithstanding, “Prince” was darkened in his understanding and “alienated from the life of God through ignorance.” He had given himself over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness (Eph. 4:18-19). Those who truly want to please and praise God are careful to let no corrupt speech proceed out of their mouths (Eph. 4:29). If “Prince” were truly interested in honoring the real Prince of Peace and Lord of life, then he would keep his commandments (John 14:15). If we truly know God we will hear and heed the truth (1 John 4:2-6). God desires true knowledge of Him more than burnt offerings (Hos. 6:6).

Madonna is another modern example of one who professes to know God while denying such a profession by her wicked deeds. Her wearing of the crucifix does not fool God into believing that she truly loves his Son who died upon that instrument of death. Madonna once said that she wore the crucifix because it was sexy due to the fact that a half-naked man died upon it. Some years ago a spokesman for Madonna appeared on one of the morning talk shows attempting to convince the viewing public that Madonna is full of faith and extremely religious. His “defense” of her “faith” behooves us to ask, “How in the world can people be so warped in their sense of what it means to know God?” The answer is found in the last phrase of Titus 1:15: “their mind and conscience are defiled.” Madonna denies the very thing she affirms by the deeds she performs. By her works she denies God, being abominable, disobedient and unto every good work reprobate. Knowing God is **more** than mere lip service and wearing a gold cross on a chain around our neck.

“Prince”, Madonna and other entertainment figures are certainly and sadly not the only ones who affirm their

love for God while denying that very affirmation by the way that they live. Political leaders often affirm a strong faith in God and the Bible and then turn right around and enact policies which are diametrically opposed to God and his Word. If these men truly know God, they will honor his teaching on all subjects, including abortion and homosexuality. Yet, by their works they deny him and practice disobedience and abomination under the guise of love for God and religious freedom. Entertainer Garth Brooks recently expressed his support for homosexuals and said that this was so hard to do because of his love for the Bible. Thus, he denies the very thing he affirms. If he truly loves the Bible as he claims to, then he will believe what it teaches about homosexuality (Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10).

Finally, it must be admitted that even some members of the Lord's church are guilty of affirming their love for God while denying it by their actions. They profess to love God with all of their heart, soul, strength and mind and then fail to attend all of the services. They sing that they want to be workers for the Lord and then spurn every opportunity afforded unto them to prove it. We must realize that God sees through all of our hypocritical masks and knows how we really feel about him (Psalm 33:13-15; Heb. 4:13; John 2:24-25). More important than merely wearing a gold cross around our necks is our responsibility to bear the cross we have been called by Christ to bear (Luke 9:23). Rather than denying God by our works, let us deny ourselves (Matt. 16:24). Let us never be guilty of denying what we affirm.

What Are The Rewards Of Knowing God And The Consequences Of Not Knowing Him?

If we know God we will reap the reward of eternal life (John 17:3). The people that know their God will be

strong (Dan. 11:32). The people who know God will be known by God (Exod. 33:17; John 10:14, 27). On the other hand, God will pour out His fury upon the heathen who know Him not (Jer. 10:25). On the day of judgment:

the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

God has given us a great privilege in revealing Himself unto us. Therefore, in preparation for the judgment day it is our task to know no God but one (Hos. 13:4). Whereas the whole world may lie in wickedness, let us so live that we may say “We know that we are of God...My God, we know thee” (1 John 5:19; Hos. 8:2). And when we say that we know God with our lips, let us live in such a way that no one will doubt the sincerity of our profession!

Endnotes

1 Deidre Sullivan, **What Do We Mean When We Say God** (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 95.

2 Ibid, p. 117.

3 C. S. Lewis, **Mere Christianity** (New York: McMillan, 1943), p. 135. Although Lewis quotes this man somewhat disapprovingly, he agrees, remarkably, that the man really did have “a real experience of God out in the desert.”

4 A. W. Tozer, **The Knowledge Of The Holy** (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 9.

5 Ibid, p. 10.

6 J. I. Packer, **Knowing God** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), pp. 14-15.

7 An excerpt from a sermon delivered on January 7th,

1855 by Charles Spurgeon as quoted by Packer in **Knowing God**, p. 13.

8 James Boyd, **System of Salvation: Comments on Romans** (Nashville: Williams Printing Co., 1990), pp. 12-13.

9 Max Anders, **God: Knowing Our Creator** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), p.46.

CHAPTER 3

THE NATURE OF GOD

GARLAND ELKINS

I *APPRECIATE THE PRIVILEGE* of being one of the speakers during this lectureship. The church at Southaven is composed of many outstanding Christians. I respect her elders, Bill Pierce, and Coleman Simpson, assisted by an outstanding group of deacons. The church at Southaven is fortunate to have B. J. Clarke and Bill Bryant as her preachers.

Introduction

The two previous lectures serve as a background for my lecture. A study of **The Nature of God** presupposes the existence of God. Therefore evidence has been given for the existence of God; this includes both Biblical and scientific proofs. Then the second lecture, building upon the first, raises and answers the question: "Can God be known?" It has been shown that a finite creature can indeed know the infinite God! This knowledge comes to us through God's revelation to man i.e., the Bible. Then there was a discussion of the blessings and responsibilities available to us when we come to know God.

Now, let us study in some detail the nature of God.

1. God is spiritual. Jesus said: "God is a spirit" (John 4:24). A number of things are involved in the truth that God is spirit, and we briefly examine this great

truth. God is immaterial; He does not have a body. Jesus said, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold me having" (Luke 24:39). However, when God is referred to, sometimes the Bible uses anthropomorphic language in describing God and His attributes. The word anthropomorphic is defined as "man's form."

The Bible does, by the use of this figure, represent God as having bodily parts. He is represented as having hands. Isaiah wrote, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts" (Isa. 65:2). The Hebrew writer wrote, "And, thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands" (Heb. 1:10). God is represented as having feet: "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8). The psalmist wrote, "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thine hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (Psm. 8:6). Likewise, the Lord is represented as having eyes:

That thine eyes may be opened toward this house night and day, even toward this place of which thou hast said, my name shall be there; that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place (1 Kings 8:29).

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly; therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars (2 Chron. 16:9).

The above statements are anthropomorphic and symbolic representations, i.e., accommodative language, language used of God in order that we as finite beings may be able to better apprehend God, Who is Infinite.

2. God is invisible. We are told that the Israelites, “saw no manner of similitude” (i.e., form G. E.) when He appeared to them in Horeb, and therefore they were told not to make to themselves any image of Him (Deut. 4:15-19). God told Moses that no man could see Him and live (Exod. 33:20); and John wrote, “No man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). Paul refers to Him as “the invisible God” (Rom. 1:20; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17) and declares that no man has seen Him or can see Him (1 Tim. 6:16). Therefore how great will be the indescribable privilege of actually seeing God! The following Scriptures are so encouraging to the redeemed of God: “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psm. 17:15); “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8); “Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). “And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4).

Since God is “invisible” what is meant when the Scriptures say that men saw God? For example: “And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (Gen. 32:30). Moreover he said, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exod. 3:6).

Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under

his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness (Exod. 24:9-10).

And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold; wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? (Num. 12:6-8).

“And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10). Also, Isaiah wrote, “In the year that Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” (Isa. 6:1).

How is it that we read that “no man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18), and we read, “I saw also the Lord” (Isa. 6:1). The answer is: men saw the reflection of His glory, but they did not see His essence. God said to Moses:

Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock; And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen (Exod. 33:20-23).

The description of Christ as stated by the Hebrew writer is most impressive:

Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3).

2. God is Self-Existence. God has the ground of His existence in Himself. We have the ground of our existence outside ourselves; but God is not dependent for His existence upon anything outside of Himself. Thomas Aquinas said, He is “the first cause, Himself uncaused.” His self-existence is implied in His affirmation, “I AM THAT I AM.” “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exod. 3:14).

3. God is Infinite. God is not limited or circumscribed by space; on the contrary all finite space is dependent upon Him. He is above space.

4. God is Alive. The idea of **spirit** implies that God is alive. Therefore, He is called “the living God” (Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26; Psm. 84:2; Matt. 16:16; 1 Thess. 1:9). God is the source of life to all things. Paul wrote to Timothy and said, “I charge thee in the sight of God, who giveth life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession” (1 Tim. 6:13). Jesus said, “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26). The psalmist wrote, “For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light” (Psm. 36:9). God is alive, whereas the idols of the heathen are dead:

But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have

mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord; he is their help and their shield (Psm. 115:3-9).

God Is The Source Of All Life

God is the source of all Life. Materialism, Humanism, and Evolution are alternate to life in the minds of some people, but they are not only worthless as things worthy of our trust and belief, they are condemning. Another alternative to considering God as the source of spiritual life is Liberalism. Still another alternative to considering God as the source of spiritual life is Judaism.

Christ has made possible the new life in Him. "I am come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." We are not children of God by virtue of our living in a Christian land. We are not Christians simply because we have godly parents, but we are children of God because we as individuals have obediently submitted to the will of the Lord (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9; Rom. 6:16-17).

This new life is available to all. There is opportunity available to all to become Christians. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35). Since "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), we can know how to worship Him.

How To Be Partakers Of The Divine Nature

The characteristics that one as a Christian should add to his life, as spoken of in the language of the

inspired apostle Peter, are to be added each and every day and we should develop all of them every day instead of just one at a time. They are seven in number.

1. Peter wrote, “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue” (2 Pet. 1:5). Virtue carries with it the idea of courage, bravery, manliness, power, and strength. There is a courage that flows in our veins that transcends those who demonstrate physical courage.

Virtue is founded on faith. It takes courage for the mouth to open and under any and all circumstances to say, “I am a Christian.” In the first century, when the Jews considered a Christian to be a renegade, apostate, unpatriotic, and profane, it took courage to be a Christian. Yet, Paul said “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,” and he expressed the sentiments of thousands of his fellow Christians. Courage is the fortitude of faith that enables one to become a Christian and to remain a faithful child of God.

We have Christianity today because of the courage of valiant saints, who came away from the foot of the cross to preach Christ and Him crucified (Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 2:2). Paul is a tremendous example of faithfulness and courage (Phil. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:16-17).

The perfect example of moral courage is seen in every phase of Christ’s life, and it is especially seen as He comes in loneliness to the garden of Gethsemane when He prayed: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). In this is reflected Christ’s faith and confidence in His Father, and as He left this scene, He showed unparalled courage against His enemies. We need to add to our faith, courage (virtue)!

2. Peter wrote, “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue

knowledge...” (2 Pet. 1:5).

The inter-relationship of these seven “Christian graces” is very important. We need to keep in mind that faith is the all-encompassing foundation of the Christian life. Then one will undoubtedly notice that these various elements of growth are spoken of in the context as supplements or strength-giving forces. Each is dependant on the others, and a full Christian life will possess each.

The Christian’s Relationship to Knowledge

One does not have to look very far before realizing that knowledge is increasing on every hand. The amount of knowledge at our disposal is incredible. The advance of knowledge in the fields of science, medicine, and all other realms is astounding. However, in all of these fields there is great need for further study. If knowledge is taken to the exclusion of application, it becomes stagnant. Therefore, unless knowledge grows and produces dynamic and beneficial results, it does not benefit.

The New Testament speaks of three kinds of knowledge. In the first place there is the knowledge which God has. This knowledge surpasses all the realm of man’s ability to comprehend. Paul wrote: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out” (Rom. 11:33). This knowledge is not under Peter’s consideration.

Then there is the knowledge of which Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 12:8 as the “word of knowledge.” This knowledge was unquestionably a supernatural knowledge that some Christians in the first century possessed as a special gift from God.

But our text (2 Pet. 1:6) speaks of another kind of

knowledge. The knowledge that Christians need to add to their faith and virtue is a knowledge of God's will. Peter wrote: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: To him be the glory both now and for ever. Amen" (2 Pet. 3:18).

In the New Testament we have a number of Scriptures urging that we increase in knowledge. The first is 2 Pet. 3:18, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." This emphasizes the need to increase. The second Scripture is Ephesians 4:11-13. Five types of offices were suggested in those verses, and though they had to do with the miraculous gifts, each one is a teaching position. The third reference is Colossians 1:9-10. From these verses we see that, as stated in verse nine, the Colossians were called upon to be **filled** with knowledge. In the second place they were urged in verse 10 to **increase** their knowledge. Knowledge is an unusual thing. One may be full of knowledge and yet learn more!

The greatest thing we can know is God (John 17:3). Once we know God obediently, then we must increase in our knowledge of God (2 Pet. 3:18).

There are two sources of knowledge of God. **First**, we can know God from what He has done. David wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psm. 19:1). The second source of knowledge of God is by what He has said. Jesus said that we must know the truth in order to be made free from sin (John 8:32).

We must grow in knowledge toward our fellowman. We must have an interest in saving his soul (1 Tim. 4:16).

3. Peter also teaches us that we must add to our knowledge, temperance (2 Pet. 1:6).

The word "temperance," "self-control"(ASV) is used

by Luke in Acts 24:25 as comprising the entire field of human relations. Paul reasoned with Felix on “righteousness, temperance and the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). If this is taken to cover the whole of man’s duty, and it is, then righteousness would relate to all of man’s heavenly responsibilities, temperance to all of his human ones, and judgment to be over both.

Peter’s use of the word in 2 Peter 1:6 is more limited, but still speaks of the entire victory that is to be gained over self. I briefly mention a few areas that require self-control.

1. Our bodies must be brought under control. Paul wrote, “But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected” (1 Cor. 9:27).

2. Our minds must be controlled. Paul wrote, “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

3. We must add to temperance, patience (2 Pet 1:6). As we have stated before, these Christian graces are interrelated and interdependent. Without our faith we would have very little incentive to add these graces and without knowledge we would not know how to cultivate the qualities of self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Jesus said, “In your patience ye shall win your souls” (Luke 21:19). As stated by the Hebrew writer, “For ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise” (Heb. 10:36).

We would like to become a strong Christian overnight, but it takes time to build a strong Christian character. The quality of the Christian which enables him to endure and await faithfully the fruition of the

promises, is that quality known as “patience.”

5. Peter next informs us that we are to add to our patience “godliness” (2 Pet. 1:6). Godliness is in the middle of the chain. The writer chose to put it next to self-control and patience. The Christian life begins with a child-like faith and dependence on God. The newborn babe knows that he cannot guide his own steps (Jer. 10:23). Gradually he acquires moral excellence; and he studies his Bible and then self-control and patience are developed. At that point some are tempted to lose sight of their need for God and become self-dependent. However, one must never lose his desire to be holy like his God, therefore godly.

There are at least three ideas that are basic in the composition of godliness. **First**, godliness requires fear of God (Eccl. 12:13-14; Heb. 12:28). **Second**, godliness requires God-likeness. Peter wrote of God and quoted Him as saying, “But like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, ye shall be holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

Godliness brings so many great blessings to our lives. Godliness gives **purpose** to our lives as Christians (Phil. 1:21-23; Gal. 2:20). Godliness supplies **power** in our lives (Heb. 11:4; Phil. 4:9). Godliness imparts **peace** to our hearts (1 Tim. 6:6)

6. Peter wrote that to godliness we should add “brotherly kindness” (2 Pet. 1:7). Brotherly kindness is enjoined in the New Testament because it is right and does not become right simply because it is commanded. It has always been right.

Lovingkindness is the result of the combination of love and kindness resulting in a new virtue from the best elements of both, love giving to kindness its warmth and intensity, while kindness gives to love the vehicle

for its expression.

Brotherly kindness is something that may be possessed by every member in the Lord's church from the highest to the lowest, the richest to the poorest. A genuine word, or act, or thought of kindness, though it be but the giving of a cup of water in the name of our Lord will abide into eternity (Matt. 10:42; Matt. 25:34-40).

7. Then Peter wrote that we are to add to our brotherly kindness "charity" (2 Pet. 1:7, KJV) ("love" ASV). It is evident that these seven series of grace are a unity. They are links in a chain; each is distinct and separate, yet each is bound to others by an interweaving of unity. We are to strive to excel in all seven of these Christian graces.

Jesus explains what true love is when He summarized love in two great commandments. It is recorded:

And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-40).

We prove that we love God by doing His will. John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3).

We need more scriptural teaching on the subject of Biblical love, and above all we need a greater demonstration of it in the brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17). The great apostle of love wrote, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed

and truth” (1 John 3:18). I have read that it was said by people of the world, as they beheld the Lord’s church in the first century, “Behold, how they love one another!” That should be true of the Lord’s church today! Also, the lost should be able to look at the church also and say, “Behold, how they love others!”

“And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:14).

Conclusion

We are grateful that we can learn the truth about the nature of God. We also are so greatly blessed that we may “be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). May we remember the following:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity: For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:5-8).

CHAPTER 4

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

JAMES MEADOWS

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD was an expression that once was frequently mentioned and generally understood. Pink wrote:

But, today, to make mention of God's sovereignty is, in many quarters, to speak in an unknown tongue. Were we to announce from the average pulpit that the subject of our discourse would be the sovereignty of God, it would sound very much as though we had borrowed a phrase from one of the dead languages..... Alas! that the doctrine which is the key to history, the interpreter of providence, the warp and woof of Scripture, and the foundation of Christian theology, should be so sadly neglected and so little understood.¹

There are many reasons why one must have a proper concept of God, but I mention two. **First, our age is one of skepticism and doubt.** There are at least six schools of infidelity. There is the atheist who denies the existence of God; the skeptic who doubts the existence of God; the agnostic who claims to be neutral, neither denying nor affirming the existence of God; the Deist who acknowledges the Supreme Being, but denies the Bible as

his revelation to man; the destructive or higher critic who professes to believe in God and the Bible, but usually rejects its miracles and its inspiration; and, there is the Unitarian who claims to accept the Bible, but admits only one person in the Godhead and has a system of denials.

Second, one's concept of God will determine one's moral behavior. This truth is clearly seen in Romans 1:20-32:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are

not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who, knowing the judgement of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

The methodology planned in this lesson will be as follows: (1) what is meant by the term “sovereignty of God;” (2) does the Bible teach the “sovereignty of God;” (3) how does the Bible definition of the “sovereignty of God” compare to the Calvinistic definition of it; (4) how do the sovereignty of God and the free moral agency of man blend together; and (5) of what comfort is it to know that God is sovereign?

What Is Meant By The Term “The Sovereignty Of God?”

The word **sovereign** means a “monarch; a king, queen, or other supreme ruler. A person who has sovereign power or authority.” **Sovereignty** means “the quality or state of being sovereign. The status, dominion, power, or authority of a sovereign.”³

Pink gives a very comprehensive definition of the sovereignty of God:

We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of the God, the godhood of God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the

Most High, doing according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (Dan. 4:35). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psm. 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the...Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords... (1 Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.⁴

Zacharias defines the sovereignty of God like this:

We read of God's sovereignty, we read of a world that was created out of nothing. We read that God directs the paths of individuals and even of history. We read of his power over the elements. We read of his self-existence, uncaused by any other force or reason. In short, God is the sovereign ruler of the universe....It is the sovereignty of God that gives life and history a purpose. He is sovereign in the best and purest of the term.⁵

How shall we conceive of the sovereignty of God? Is it possible to define it in such a way to make it acceptable and helpful to all? Thiessen writes:

It seems to us that all must agree that by the sovereignty of God we mean that a Creator of all things visible and invisible, God is the owner of all; that He, therefore, has an absolute right to rule over all (Matt. 20:15; Rom. 9:20-21); and that He actually exercises this authority in the

universe (Eph. 1 :11). It seems to us that all must agree also that, just as the decrees of God do not originate in necessity, nor in caprice or arbitrary will, but are based on His wise and holy counsel, so the sovereignty of God is not exercised on the basis of arbitrary will, but on that of His wise and holy counsel⁶

Hodge says: “Although this sovereignty is thus universal and absolute, it is the sovereignty of wisdom, holiness, and love.” ⁷

Does The Bible Teach The Sovereignty Of God?

The Word of God abundantly teaches that God is sovereign in the universe:

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all (1 Chron. 29:11-12)... The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein...(Psm. 24:1). Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die (Ezek. 18:4). Jesus said:...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).

Nebuchadnezzar recognized the sovereignty of God over the whole universe:

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, 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 doest thou? (Dan. 4:34-35).

The Bible's revelation of the attributes of God can belong only to a sovereign being. What are these attributes?

First, God is **immutable**. "By 'immutability' is meant permanence, or unchangeableness. God is immutable in that his attributes and his nature never change."⁸ God is forever the same in essence, in knowledge, in character, in purpose, in blessedness:

For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed (Mal. 3:6).
...Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning...(Jas. 1:17).

Second, God is eternal. "God's nature (a) is without beginning or end; (b) is free from all succession of time; and (c) contains in itself the cause of time."⁹ "For I lift up my head to heaven, and say, I live forever" (Deut. 32:40). "Before the mountains were brought forth ... even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Psm. 90:2).

Third, there is the **omnipresence** of God. The conception that God is everywhere present is indeed hard

for the finite mind to form. The words of the Psalmist express the thought of the wisest of men: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psm. 139:6).

Fourth, God is **omnipotent**. Omnipotence may be defined as the perfect ability of God to do all things that his nature or character can suggest. Nothing is impossible with God that is in the realm of possibility:

In asserting that God is almighty, we do not claim that he can do what is absurd or contradictory. We do not claim that he can make a statement both true and false, or make a man that is physically dead and alive at the same time, or that he can make a four-sided triangle.¹⁰

Fifth, there is the **omniscience** of God:

By this we mean God’s perfect and eternal knowledge of all things which are objects of knowledge, whether they be actual or possible, past, present, or future.¹¹

He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by name...(Psm. 147:4)...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 (Heb. 4:13).

Perhaps the one Scripture which most emphatically asserts the **sovereignty of God is the ninth chapter of Romans**. In order to understand Romans nine, one must realize that Paul:

is here proving the unfettered freedom of the Almighty **before** he gave the gospel. A freedom

which permitted him to give it when, how, where, and to whom he chose, save as he had gradually limited himself, slightly, from time to time by his promises. This freedom permitted him at last to give a gospel that the self-righteous Jews saw fit to reject and become castaways. Paul, in all his argument, says never a word about God's limitations in the gospel after the gospel was given; for they have nothing to do with his argument which relates to God's freedom **when preparing** the gospel and **before** the gospel was given. Failure to note this simple, obvious distinction has brought forth that abortive system of inexorable logic called Calvinism....¹²

First, Paul shows that the righteousness of faith is not contrary to God's promises. The promise belongs only to those who believe (Rom. 9:6-13). The one that gave the promise is the sovereign God. God never did promise blessings through "fleshly" Israel, but "spiritual" Israel (9:6). Just because one was a descendant of Abraham didn't mean one was a child of Abraham (9:7). Even though Abraham had Ishmael and Isaac, God gave the promise to Isaac (9:7). Then there were Jacob and Esau--same father and mother; twins; alike in all aspects of their status. What was the difference? God chose Jacob, even before they were born. Sovereignty of God! (9:11).

Second, God shows His sovereignty in His purpose, i.e., "the purpose of God according to election" (9:11; Rom. 8:28). Man had absolutely nothing to do in the planning of God's purpose. It was:

according to the good pleasure of his will...(Eph. 1:5); according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will...(Eph. 1:11); According to his good pleasure

which he purposed in himself...(Eph. 1:9); according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began...(2 Tim.1:9); Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved...(Tit. 3:5).

Prothesis here rendered purpose is *protithemi*, which means to place or set before. Accordingly, **prothesis** means a placing or setting before. Purpose from the Latin **propono** is not predicated of men, but of God; and it denotes not the physical act of placing things locally or in front of him, but his act of placing them before his mind so as to distinctly see them. The placing is before the mind and the seeing is mental seeing.¹³

God set before Him, in the **prothesis**, everything that pertains to man's redemption and among them His predetermination that man should be called by the gospel. "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the ordaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:14). Thus to be called according to God's purpose is to be called by the gospel:

It is therefore not to be called by some secret impulse of the Holy Spirit; neither is it to be called 'effectually' or 'ineffectually,' as the schoolmen phrase it.¹⁴

Third, God's sovereignty is seen in His mercy and wrath:

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will

have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy and whom he will he hardeneth (Rom. 9:14-18).

But doesn't this leave out human character and works? Is such right and just? Paul rejects any idea of unrighteousness with God. He does not even try to defend the righteousness of God. There is a basic fault in all that measures God by human standards. "But when man sets out to judge God's dealings by man's own standards, the results cannot be other than the conclusion that God's goodness is faulty."¹⁵ If God's mercy had its cause in man's character, it would really not be mercy. "God's mercy depends on God's mercy; that is to say that no reason can ever be given for it than that God will have mercy."¹⁶

The Bible Definition Of The Sovereignty Of God Compared To The Calvinistic Definition

Romans nine is:

the stronghold of Calvinism, the arsenal of that disappointing remnant who believe in eternal fore-ordination according to the absolute decree of the sovereign will of God.¹⁷

Feenstra wrote:

The heart of Calvinism is to be found in the sovereignty of God. One expression of this is the five points of Calvinism, which brings the

sovereignty of God to the fore as does no other doctrine.¹⁸

Calvin believed in the “absolute sovereignty” of God. This truth is forcefully set forth in Calvin’s belief that some are eternally damned by the operation of God’s sovereign will.

That some men are eternally damned was a traditionally orthodox and almost uncontested belief. Like some Augustinians before him, but with greater insistence and exactness, Calvin linked this damnation of some with the operation of God’s sovereign will. What is to become of every man in the hereafter has been determined by God’s eternal decree.¹⁹

Calvinism’s insistence that God is “absolutely free” robs man of his freedom to do right or wrong. McGarvey wrote:

God was free but in his goodness he chose to provide salvation to those who would accept it on his conditions. Thus the Lord, being free, chose to be bound by his covenants and promises, even as the Lord Jesus, being rich, chose to be poor (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul proves God’s **past** freedom; no one save the Jew of his day ever denied it; but to say that Paul established a **present** freedom and absolute sovereignty in God, which robs man of his freedom to do right, or wrong; repent, or continue in sin; accept Christ or reject him, etc., is to dynamite the gospel, and blast to shivers the entire rock of New Testament scripture. Calvinism denies to God the possibility of making a covenant, or giving a promise, or each of these is a forfeiture of freedom, a limitation of liberty. According to

Calvinism, God is absolutely free; according to the Scripture, he is free save where he has pledged himself to man in the gospel.²⁰

Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay; of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? 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 (Rom. 9:20-22).

In these verses Paul asserts “the absolute right of God, but denies that he applies it. Herein he differs from Calvinism, which insists that he applies it.”²¹

How Do The Sovereignty Of God And The Free Moral Agency Of Man Blend Together?

Perhaps the most difficult branch in the study of the sovereignty of God is harmonizing God’s Sovereignty with man’s responsibility. Pink calls this “the gordian knot of Theology.”²²

Some try to get around this difficulty by denying its existence. Others have acknowledged that the Scriptures present both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man, but affirm that in our present finite condition and with our limited knowledge it is **impossible** to reconcile the two truths though it is the bounden duty of the believer to receive both.²³

Calvinism insists that “free moral agency” is an “expression of human invention.”²⁴ Man is not a free moral agent. Calvin believed in the sovereignty of God, but he

did not believe in the free will of man unless it had been freed by God's illumination. "Why then ... do miserable men dare to boast of free will before they have been freed, or of their power, if they have already been freed."²⁵

Calvinism insists that the conversion of Lydia proves that man's will is not free until it is opened by the Holy Spirit. Calvin wrote:

Indeed, it does not so stand in man's own impulse, and consequently even the pious and those who fear God still have need of the especial prompting of the Spirit. Lydia, the seller of purple, **feared God**, yet her heart had to be opened to receive Paul's teaching (Acts 16:14) and to profit by it.²⁶

It is an assumption that God opened her heart by an immediate influence of the Spirit. The text does not so state. The term **open** is evidently used metaphorically—to open is to broaden or expand the mind. The text does not say God opened her heart so that she listened favorably to what Paul said, but "that she attended to things" which he had spoken. Consider the facts in the order in which they were spoken: (1) We "spoke unto the women which resorted thither" (Acts 16:13); (2) Lydia "heard us" (Acts 16:14a); (3) "whose heart the Lord opened" (Acts 16:14b); (4) "that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14c).

The fourth fact is declared to be the result of the third. It was after she heard that God opened her heart, and after her heart was opened, and because of this opening, that she attended to what she had heard...the assumption, therefore, that her heart was opened by an abstract influence of the Spirit, is entirely gratuitous and illogical, while the real cause is patent upon the

face of the narrative in the preaching done by Paul.²⁷

If man is not a “free moral agent,” and if man does not have a “free will” until acted upon by the Holy Spirit, then how does one explain many Bible verses that emphasize the free will of man. Why would Jesus invite all men to “come unto me” (Matt. 11:28), if they are unable to do so? Paul entreated the Corinthians that they “receive not the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor.6:1)—A strange warning if grace is irresistible for the limited elect. John 5:24 teaches that one has life when he hears and believes, but Calvinism teaches life before this. John 5:24 clearly teaches that the spiritually dead can “hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live,” but Calvinism teaches that one must be regenerated first:

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13).

Verse 12 shows that John is talking about those who become “sons of God” and verse 13 shows it is “of God.” One does not become a “son of God” by birth “of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.” One becomes “a son of God” by the will of God and verse 12 reveals the will of God on this matter. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God...” (“To them gave he the right to become the children of God”--ASV). The latter part of the verse shows what is included in receiving Him—“even to them that believe on his name.” But observe that “the receiving him”, or “the believing on his name,” took place before He gave the power or right to become a son of God. This reveals two interesting facts:

(1) Receiving Him, that is believing on His name, did not make them children of God, but only brought them into a relationship with Him so they could become sons of God if they chose; (2) They were able to believe before they received the power (miraculous power as taught by Calvinists). Therefore, they were able to exercise free will.

“The New Testament records that the action performed by the Holy Spirit is also said to have been accomplished by the Word of God.”²⁸ **First**, the Holy Spirit gives life through the Word of God (2 Cor. 3:6; Jas. 1:18). **Second**, we are born of the Spirit through the Word of God (John 3:3-8; 1 Pet. 1:23-25; 1 Cor. 4:15). **Third**, we are saved by the Spirit through the Word of God (Tit. 3:5; Jas. 1:21). **Fourth**, we are sanctified (1 Cor. 6:11), led (Rom. 15: 13), comforted (Acts 9:31), made alive (John 6:63) by the Spirit through the Word of God.

Campbell wrote:

The whole system of Calvinism ... is crazy just at this point ... They have not one clear idea of the subject of regeneration. It is to them a mystic mystery--a cabalistic word--a mere shibboleth. The philosophy of the mind is converted into a heap of ruins. They have the Spirit of God operating without testimony--without apprehension and comprehension--without sense, susceptibility, or feeling; and all of this for the sake of an incomprehensible, unintelligible, and worse than useless theory. I, therefore, ex animo, repudiate their whole theory of mystic influence, and metaphysical regeneration, as a vision of dreams, a dream of dreams, at war with philosophy, with the philosophy of the mind, with the Bible, with reason, with common sense, and with all Christian experience.²⁹

The Comfort Of The Sovereignty Of God

What value is there in studying and emphasizing the sovereignty of God? What does a full recognition of this truth do for the Christian? What are some blessings that come from fully accepting the sovereignty of God? Pink wrote:

The doctrine of God's sovereignty then is no mere metaphysical dogma which is devoid of practical value, but is one that is calculated to produce a powerful effect upon Christian character and the daily walk. It is the center of gravity in the system of Christian truth-the sun around which all the lesser orbs are grouped. It is the golden milestone to which every highway of knowledge leads and from which they all radiate.... It is the plumb-line by which every creed needs to be measured, the balance in which every human dogma must be weighed. It is designed and adapted to mould the affections of the heart and give a right direction of conduct. It produces gratitude in prosperity and patience in adversity. It affords comfort for the present and a sense of security respecting the unknown future.³⁰

First, fully accepting the sovereignty of God deepens our reverence and respect for Him.

The apprehension of the absolute supremacy of God is of great practical importance, for unless we have a proper regard to His high sovereignty, He will never be honored in our thoughts of Him, nor will He have his proper place in our hearts and lives.³¹

“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him” (Psm. 89:7). Spurgeon wrote:

The holiest tremble in the presence of the thrice Holy One; their familiarity is seasoned with the profoundest awe....Where angels veil their faces, men should surely bow in lowliest fashion.... Irreverence is rebellion...and the more his glories are seen by us in that nearer access, the more humbly we prostrate ourselves before his Majesty.³²

The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created (Rev. 4:10-11).

Second, acceptance of the sovereignty of God has a tremendous impact upon one’s view of man. It lends great dignity to man, for man is created in the image of God:

And God said, Let us make man in our image.... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26a-27).

Every member of the human race is the bearer of the image of the Sovereign God, and because of that each is invested with infinite value far beyond anything that our material society can provide.³³ Jesus said:

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26).

Third, acceptance of the sovereignty of God brings great comfort to the heart of the Christian because he knows that all things in God's purpose work for his good. God's purpose, in His own mind, was complete from beginning to end:

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. 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 (Rom. 8:29-30).

Knowing that the sovereignty of God involves His eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, the Christian rests assured that nothing can keep God's purpose from being accomplished. Those who are a part of it, and faithful to the end, will finally be glorified.

Fourth, acceptance of the sovereignty of God leads one to belief in, and acceptance of, the providence of God. God not only created everything, but He exercises sovereign control over it. What great comfort to know that God did not create the world and then abandon it. From the beginning to the end of the Bible the Scriptures clearly indicate that God guides and controls the affairs of men:

The Bible also teaches that God's providence is one way wherein he accomplishes His sovereign will in the lives of men. God's providence is His continued guidance of the world toward the end

that He has appointed through the exercise of His divine power, goodness and wisdom.³⁴

God's providence is God's care and protection of His creation, i.e., it is the case of God in the preservation and government of the world through natural means:

God's care for the world necessarily involves His divine foresight (omniscience) and His almighty power. God has anticipated our needs and He has included in His creation the things required to satisfy our needs. God not only created Heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1; Acts 14:15; Psm. 146:6), but He also continues to sustain the creation with the Word of His power (Heb. 1:2-3; Col. 1:17; Neh. 9:6; Psm. 104:148). Hence the continued preservation of the universe is a part of God's providence and takes place through the natural laws He has established.³⁵

The late G. C. Brewer wrote his autobiography after he was told he had terminal cancer:

The surgeons...found that which we had all feared and suspected and, of course, we all knew then that I had only a limited time in which to live...The readers may wonder how any one reacts to a sentence such as that that has been pronounced upon me...For myself, I am perfectly resigned and willing to say the Lord's will be done. I have always believed and preached often that the Lord would be with us in the...valley of the shadow of death...I am fully confident that my name is written in heaven where the names of all of God's firstborn children are enrolled (Heb. 12:23). The Lord taught us to rejoice because of this fact ... It is coming to me in the seventy-second year of my life and no doubt this

is the way the Lord wants it to be and what the Lord wills, I accept. I am glad, however, that I can rely upon what I have preached and prayed all the days of my life. I have prayed for the Lord to be with me in the last hour and I have trusted that he would do all that he promised ... I may live on for some months yet to come or the hour may pass within thirty days or less—no one can tell. But that I am fast approaching the hour of my departure is of no question at all. The Lord's will be done! Amen.

What a statement of full faith in the providence of God. God has promised “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:5b-6).

Conclusion

Present day conditions call for a more thorough examination of the sovereignty of God. A due apprehension of God's sovereignty promotes the spirit of worship; provides an incentive to practical godliness; inspires zeal in service; and is deeply humbling to the human heart:

Faith endures... as seeing Him who is invisible... (Heb. 11:27); endures disappointments, the hardships, and the heart-aches of life, by recognizing that all comes from the hand of him who is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. But so long as we are occupied with any other object than God Himself, there will be neither rest for the heart nor peace for the mind. But when we receive all that enters our lives as from His hand, no matter what may be our circumstances or surroundings—whether in a hovel, a prison-dungeon, or a martyr's stake—we

shall be enabled to say,...The lines are fallen unto
me in pleasant places...(Psm. 16:6).³⁶

Endnotes

- 1 Arthur W. Pink, **The Sovereignty of God** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1930), p. 19.
- 2 All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.
- 3 **Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary** (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam Webster, Inc., Pub. 1991), p. 1128.
- 4 Pink, **The Sovereignty of God**, p. 19.
- 5 Ravi Zacharias, **Cries of the Heart** (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p. 14.
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- 7 A. A. Hodge, **Outlines of Theology** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1949), pp. 173-74.
- 8 Albert F. Gray, **Christian Theology** (Anderson, Ind., The Warren Press, 1944), Vol. 1, p. 116.
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- 12 J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, **Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans** (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Co., 1916), p. 397.
- 13 Moses E. Lard., **Commentary on Paul's Letters to Romans** (Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Pub. Co., 1875), p. 280.
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- 15 Anders Nygren, **Commentary on Romans** (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 365.
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21 McGarvey, **Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans**, p. 405.

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23 Pink, **The Sovereignty of God**, p. 144.

24 Pink, **The Sovereignty of God**, p. 143.

25 Calvin, **Institutes of the Christian Religion**, p. 265.

26 Calvin, **Institutes of the Christian Religion**, Vol. 2, pp. 979-980.

27 J. W. McGarvey, **A Commentary on Acts of Apostles** (Cincinnati: Franklin Type Foundry, 1863), Reprinted In 1958 by B. C. Goodpasture, pp. 202-203.

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29 Campbell-Rice Debate, **A Debate on Christian Baptism** (Lexington, Ky., A. T. Skillman & Son, 1844), p. 619.

30 Pink, **The Sovereignty of God**, p. 213.

31 Pink, **The Sovereignty of God**, p. 215.

32 C. H. Spurgeon, **The Treasury of David** (McLean, Virginia: McDonald Publishing Co., n.d.), Vol. Two, Part Two, p. 26.

33 Boice, **Our Sovereign God**, p. 169.

34 Jerry Gross, **Providence and the Miraculous**, The Southeastern Evangelist, April, 1979, p. 2.

35 Gross, **Providence and the Miraculous**, p. 2.

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CHAPTER 5

THE WORK OF THE GODHEAD IN CREATION

BARRY GRIDER

THE DOCTRINE OF THE GODHEAD is one of the most complicated and misunderstood of all Biblical subjects. A detailed study of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit has perhaps long been neglected, even by our brethren. One reason is that the concept of the Godhead can be difficult to ascertain, especially when you consider how three can be in one. Another reason for difficulty in understanding the Godhead is we cannot compare the Godhead with anything else with which we are familiar. Paul himself said:

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device (Acts 17:29).

While I am able to compare one man to another man, one animal to another animal, one tree to another tree, I cannot compare the Godhead with another Godhead. The reason is clear – there is only one Godhead. I believe in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit because I believe the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Nature itself teaches us, through its marvelous

design, order, and beauty, that there is a supernatural being. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge” (Psm.19:1-2).

Furthermore, Paul stated:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead: so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

So while the creation bears witness to Deity, it does not reveal His nature nor His will for mankind. God chose to do this through written revelation (1 Cor. 2:9-13). Because I believe in the tried and tested revelation of God to man, the written Word, I believe in the divine Godhead. I also, through the revelation of Scripture, believe in the triune nature of God. That is, one Godhead or Godhood, which is composed of three distinct personalities - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this lesson is to explore how each person in the Godhead contributed to the creation of the world.

Reflections Of A Triune God In Creation

While the Godhead is incomparable to anything in creation, one can see the reflections of a triune God in creation. As an artist demonstrates his personality and nature in his work, so has the Godhead. Consider:

Threefold Interrelation Of
space (distance)
time
velocity (movement)

Each is dependent upon the other two for existence. Each, in fact, is defined by a relationship of the other two. There can be no **time** without **space** or **movement**, and there can be no **space** without **time** and **movement**. In mathematical terms it is expressed as a formula which signifies that what is on the left side is **equal** to, or **is**, the result of the relationship on the right.

Threefold Dimensions Of Space:

length
width
height

Space is created in three dimensions. Imagine a person all his life who has only been shown a piece of paper from one dimension – its edge (or width)? This person obviously would not really know “a piece of paper” as an entity until he sees it from its three dimensions. In this sense, the one entity depends on these three factors.

Threefold Division Of Time:

past
present
future

Threefold Division Of Color:

red
green
blue

These are called the primary colors because from them all other colors can be made.

Three Basic Components Of Matter:

proton

neutron
electron

It has been determined that all created elements are composed of **atoms**, which, in turn, are primarily composed of a different number of these three particles. This number will determine what the element is.

Threefold Family Unit:

father
mother
child

Remember that these do not necessarily prove a trinitarian God, but do reflect such. Even man himself reflects the triune nature of God. The Scriptures say, “And God said, Let us make man in our **image**, after our **likeness...**” (Gen. 1:26; emphasis BMG). God made man consisting of body, soul, and spirit. The body is our physical structure. The soul is the inner being that composes one’s thought processes, conscience, and mental understanding. The spirit is that part of man that shall one day be clothed with an eternal, non-decaying body (2 Cor. 5:1-2).

The Testimony Of The Scriptures

We have already examined that the Scriptures are God’s way of revealing Himself to mankind. In the Bible we read about the nature, personality, essence, and attributes of God. Also, the Godhead is composed of three distinct personalities. Each member of the Godhead works in total unity and harmony with the other members. Therefore, the divine Godhead must have worked in harmony with each other to bring about such a creation.

The Role Of The Godhead In Creation

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). No more precise and succinct statement could ever be found concerning the creation. God did it! Every believer in the Bible understands this. However, what member of the divine Godhead created this magnificent expanse we call the universe? Remember that the Godhead always works in harmony with each other. The truth is that all three played a significant and different role in the creation of the material universe. Genesis 1:1 makes this clear. The Hebrew word for God in this passage is *Elohim*. This word is plural in number. For example, in Isaiah 6:2, we read, “Above it stood the seraphims,” denoting a specific order of angels, used in the plural sense. A seraph would equal one. Therefore, Elohim created the heaven and the earth. Again, this does not mean we worship a multiplicity of Gods, but rather one God in nature, essence, and unity. However, the Godhead is made up of three distinct personalities.

Genesis 1 is a testimony to the creative work of the Godhead:

- God created light (v. 3)
- God created the firmament (v. 6)
- God created dry land, grass, trees (vs. 10-12)
- God created the sun, moon, and stars (vs. 14-16)
- God created the sea creatures and fowl (vs. 20-21)
- God created the land animals (v. 24)

The Godhead three, having participated in creation, is further seen in Genesis 1:26:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:
and let them have dominion over the fish of the
sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the

cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

To whom was Jehovah speaking when He said, “Let us make man in our image”? Was He speaking to the angels? No. Heretofore, there is no mention of the angels and furthermore while God speaks to the angelic realm the Scriptures never reveal God seeks their counsel.¹ Was He speaking to the animals? No reference is ever made to the animal kingdom being made in the image of God. In fact, man was given dominion over all the animals (Gen. 1:26). His superiority over them is further seen in Hebrews 2:7, “Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands.” Jehovah, in Genesis 1:26, was speaking to the other members of the Godhead.

How was man to be created in the image of God? Is God flesh and blood? No! “God is a **spirit** and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24, emphasis BMG). Man, therefore, having been made in the image of God, possesses a spirit within himself. “And God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). God, by the word of His power, created all things. “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Psm. 33:9).

God The Father

The Planner And Designer Of Creation

God has always existed; however the universe has not always existed. Matter is not eternal. Therefore, it came about through divine planning and design. The material creation is arranged with order and precision reflecting the One who brought such about through His

divine wisdom. God, who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, has the power and authority to create, as He will, those things most pleasing in His sight.

This universe, and particularly the creation of man, came about through the mind of God, for His good pleasure. John wrote, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). How gracious we should be that our Heavenly Father is described by such attributes as gracious, loving, kind, just, merciful, and forgiving.

These divine descriptions are reflected in this material world. One with the human eye and listening ear can better understand the nature of his Creator by looking at His creation. Because of God's infinite power, wisdom, and love, He gave man a place of habitation that was just the proper distance to the sun, He gave him air to breathe, food which could be grown to sustain his life, etc. All of this is part of His divine planning and wisdom. Even the redemption of mankind, which is to be discussed in the next chapter, demonstrates God's forethought and planning:

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:9-11).

God already had devised salvation's plan through His Son, even before the world began. Thus, the Scriptures make clear, the material creation came about through divine forethought and knowledge of the first

person of the Godhead. It reflects His marvelous wisdom. He was the divine architect who laid out the blueprints of what He wanted to accomplish. His power is clearly manifested:

He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens; and he causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth: he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures (Jer. 51:15-16).

Jesus Christ The Divine Agent In Creation

Boles identifies Jesus Christ as the divine agent, through whom God created all things.² This is certainly in harmony with the Scriptures, which teach that not only was Jesus Christ present at the creation, but also played a very active and distinct role in its creation. John begins his gospel by saying:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without Him was not anything made that was made (John 1:1-3).

Notice the Word was present at the time of creation. He was with God. He was God, in that He, too, had all the attributes of Deity. He, also, was the Creator of all things.

Woods says:

It is significant that 'all things' here involve each

item individually considered rather than collectively. That is, every single thing came into being ‘through’ by means of agency. These things were made – came into being – by him who was always. These (created things) are temporal; he is eternal... Thus, our Lord was that part of the divine nature – the Godhead-- through whom the creative powers were exercised. Literally, not even one thing has been made except by him. Not one tiny portion of the atom, smallest of the world’s building blocks, came into existence apart from his creative powers... Moreover, if every single thing were made by him, as the text clearly declares, he was not himself made and his eternal being is again emphasized. Thus, the inspired writer not only identified Jesus as God (possessed of the divine and eternal nature), but also as having done that which only God can do: create!¹³

Jesus Christ, identified as the Word (Logos), in the previous passage, is significant because it demonstrates how He acts as the divine spokesperson in the Godhead and as the communicator between God and His creation. In the Hebrews letter we read:

God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto by His Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

The fact that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, set the creative wisdom of God in motion is further seen in Colossians 1:

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible,

whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Col. 1:16-17).

From this passage we learn Christ made all things, including those things not seen with the human eye. He not only made all things, but the creation was made for Him.

Furthermore, His Deity is likewise noted in this passage, for “he is before all things”, which means He is coequal and co-eternal with the Father. Jesus Himself made this clear when speaking to the Pharisees, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). The fact that Jesus is still very much involved with His creation is made clear: for “by him all things consist.” He continues to hold that which He created together:

But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men (2 Pet. 3:7).

So, by the word of His power, the divine spokesman said, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast” (Psm. 33:9).

The Father and the Son are one and always have been, even before creation (John 17:5). Yet, they still function in different roles. While God the Father is the divine planner, Jesus the Word was the divine spokesperson who brought all things into existence. He still serves as the avenue between God and His creation, particularly of those who are redeemed (1 Tim. 2:5; 1 John 2:1).

The Holy Spirit The Divine Organizer In Creation

While God the Father serves as the divine planner in creation, and God the Son serves as the divine agent, it seems that God the Holy Spirit is the divine organizer. After the universe had been planned in the mind of God and spoken into existence by the Word, the Holy Spirit began molding, crafting, and putting into shape that which was created. “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the **Spirit** of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2).

A further study of inspiration gives us more detail about the role of the Holy Spirit, and from that study we develop an understanding of whom the writer is speaking of when he says, “the Spirit of God.” Here, the Bible is not speaking about an impersonal force or wind, but rather the third person of the Godhead. His moving, hovering, or brooding over the waters demonstrates what He inclined to do in bringing the creative process to fruition. Leupold states:

We could never believe that this hovering of the Spirit over the face of the waters was idle and purposeless. From all other activities that are elsewhere ascribed to the Holy Spirit we conclude that His work in this case must have been anticipatory of the creative work that followed, a kind of impregnation with divine potentialities. The germs of all that is created were placed into dead matter by him. His was the preparatory work for leading over from the inorganic to the organic. We should not be averse to holding that the foundation for all physical laws operative in the world now was laid by this preparatory activity.⁴

What do we mean when we say the Holy Spirit was the organizer of the material creation? Remember, the earth was “without form and void” (Gen. 1:2), so the Holy Spirit divinely arranged all things made.

God called into existence through Christ, the Word, the material, and the Holy Spirit guided the arrangement of the elements into a complete system that we now call the ‘universe,’ which means all created things as constituting one system. There was no universe until after the Holy Spirit had functioned.⁵

The heavens which declare the glory of God (Psm. 19:10) and which were spoken into existence by Christ (Heb. 1:2), were formulated by the Holy Spirit. Consider the following passages:

By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent (Job 26:13).

Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth (Psm. 104:30).

The Bible student knows that the Scripture has been revealed through the medium of the Holy Spirit and that He was instrumental in leading the apostles in the establishment and organization of the early church. Jesus promised His disciples, that after He ascended back to the heavenly Father, the Holy Spirit would then come and guide them into all truth (John 16:7-14). Furthermore, Paul makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is the One who reveals the Father’s will (1 Cor. 2:13). Likewise, at the dawning of time, during the week of creation, the Holy Spirit set forth the law of God to be

followed by the creation itself.

For example, the earth was to bring forth grass and the herb yielding seed after its kind (Gen 1:11). Lights were placed in the firmament to rule the day and the night (Gen. 1:14).

The animal kingdom was regulated by natural laws and was to produce after its own kind (Gen. 1:21). By command of God, the Holy Spirit then took from that which had already been created, and made man from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7). He, too, was to produce after his own kind (Gen. 1:28) and also, by divine decree was to have dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:26). Considering the role and function of the Holy Spirit, these laws were placed in motion by Him.

The Bible particularly attests to the Holy Spirit's role in the creation of man. "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty giveth me life" (Job 33:4). Man was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), and his life came about through the very breath of God (Gen. 2:7). Because man is a living soul, he has the capacity to think, reason, understand, and to choose. This comes from the Holy Spirit. "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship" (Exod. 31:3).

The earth upon which we live, in fact, the entire universe operates with precision, accuracy, and order. It is not a chaotic mass, but rather divinely arranged. For this we give thanks to the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. The crowning achievement of God's creation, mankind, should be grateful for the role of the Holy Spirit in not only fashioning him after the image of God, but also for illuminating him with a message from on high.

Conclusion

There are many valuable lessons we can learn from a study of the Godhead and particularly, how each member functioned in creation. While one may never fully comprehend the enormity of the subject, one can come to a better appreciation of the God whom we worship. He is clearly seen in all things that have been made, but even more clearly in the revelation of His divine will:

THE SPACIOUS FIRMAMENT ON HIGH
The spacious firmament on high, with all the blue
ethereal sky,
And spangled heavn's a shining frame, Their great
Original proclaim:
Th' unwearied sun from day to day, Does his
Creator's pow'r display,
And publishes to every land, The work of an
almighty hand.

Soon as the evening shade prevail, the moon takes
up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the list'ning earth, Repeats the
story of her birth;
While all the stars that round her burn, And all
the planets in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they roll, And spread the
truth from pole to pole.

What tho' in solemn silence all, Move round this
dark terrestrial ball?
What tho' no real voice nor sound, Amid their
radiant orbs be found?
In reason's ear they all rejoice, And utter forth a
glorious voice,
For ever singing as they shine, "The hand that
made us is divine."

Joseph Addison

Endnotes

1 H. C. Leupold, **Exposition of Genesis** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1942), 88, 89.

2 H. Leo Boles, **The Holy Spirit** (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1942), 36.

3 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary on The Gospel According to John** (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1989), 24.

4 Leupold, 50.

5 Boles, 38.

CHAPTER 6

THE WORK OF THE GODHEAD IN REDEMPTION

BARRY GILREATH, JR.

THE TOPIC ASSIGNED TO ME was one that I had great interest in developing. There is no greater topic for consideration by mankind than subject matter dealing with humanity's redemption from sin. Many, if not all, of the world's struggles could be eased or even eliminated, if men would pay closer attention to the work of the Godhead in redemption, and then make the proper response that such demands.

The most beautiful love story ever written was not dreamed up in the mind of some talented writer in Hollywood, nor was it authored by any mortal creature. It was given by the hand of God himself. Using inspired men He penned the great story of redemption that has been anticipated and realized by people of all ages and times. The very fact that there is redemption implies that there is also a redeemer. There has never been nor ever will be a greater redeemer than Jehovah God who reveals Himself through the personalities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hence, the study of the role of the Godhead and the redemption of mankind is one that is especially worthy of our attention in this lectureship.

The subject under discussion is predicated on several fundamental truths: first, that there are a plurality of

Divine Persons sharing the same Godly nature and attributes, who are described collectively as the Godhead (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9); second, that the Divine will of the Godhead has been revealed to God's most prized creation: mankind (Gen. 2:16-17; Heb. 1:1-3; Matt. 16:17; Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 2:7-13; Gal. 3:23); third, that mankind has transgressed the will of Deity and stands in jeopardy of being permanently alienated from his God (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12; 3:23; Isa. 59:2); fourth, that Deity has intervened in order to offer fallen man a way of escape and pardon (Jer. 33:8; 31:33-34; Acts 17:2-3; Eph. 1:7); and last, those who accept the gift of the Godhead will be rewarded eternally (1 John 5:11; Rom. 6:23; Rev. 2:10), and those who reject God's gracious gift of redemption will suffer everlasting consequences (2 Thess. 1:7-9; 1 Pet. 4:17-18).

For the purpose of our study, the material in this lecture has been divided into a simple, yet profound, outline that brethren have been using for years. I have found the outline to be a convenient, concise, and orderly fashion in which to organize the subject matter assigned.

The Father Wrought It

Webster defines 'wrought' as, "worked into shape by artistry or effort." Hence, it is inferred that the Father was the personality of the Godhead who shaped or fashioned the redemption of mankind into the beautiful piece of art work that it is. This assertion in no way minimizes or suggests inferiority in the roles or works of the Spirit and Son. It only helps to clarify the respective roles and works that each Divine Person performed in the redemptive process.

Sometimes in discussing the subject at hand, it is common to hear people refer to the Trinity collectively as "God, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Although this is an

appropriate description of Deity, it is possible that some brethren have been left with a false impression of the Divine equality that each of the three Persons share. It is disturbing and sad to teach Bible classes on this subject and hear brethren sincerely espouse misunderstandings regarding the Deity of the individual Persons in the Trinity. Some brethren seemingly have the impression that the Father is somehow more Divine in His nature than the Spirit and Son. He is **exclusively** referred to as 'God'. The Second and Third Persons of the Godhead are assumed to have inferior Divine qualities, and are rarely, if ever referred to by this Divine name.

This is similar to the false doctrine advocated by Jehovah's Witnesses who attempt to make the Son to be 'a god', but not 'the God'. Both concepts are false and distort the beauty of the shared Divinity among the Godhead. The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit possess all Divine traits and qualities. Their differences are not in supposed levels of Divinity, but rather in the role that each performs in their united work. Although 'God' is an accurate description of the Father, it should not be limited **exclusively** to Him.

The phrase "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" as given by our Savior in Matthew 28:19, profoundly clarifies Their relationship in Their roles, and demonstrates the equality shared among all members of the Trinity. The name 'God' can refer to any particular person in the Godhead (John 4:23-24; John 20:26-28; Acts 5:3-4), but is not, nor should be, limited to **exclusively** any one Person all the time.

The role of the First Person in the Godhead is wonderfully described in the epistle to the Hebrews. In chapter 1:5 the text reads:

For unto which of the angels said he at any time,
Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?

And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

The first section of the verse is taken from Psalm 2:7 and the latter from 2 Samuel 7:13-16. In their original setting the passages had application to the Davidic throne. Ultimately their fulfillment was in Christ. This is the point of the Hebrew writer.

For our purposes in this study, the passage sets forth a vivid word picture of the role and work of the First Person in the Trinity. He is the Father. He assumed a role and work that was consistent with the responsibilities an earthly father might assume. He took the lead and 'worked into shape' the redemptive process of the Godhead. Both the Son and the Holy Spirit were subject to Him as a child is to his father. This is emphasized time and time again.

Christ emphasized His subjection to the Father on numerous occasions. We read in the gospel of John:

For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak...for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do...When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things (12:49; 5:36; 8:28).

Concerning the subjection of the Spirit we read:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:26).

Subjection should never be confused with inferiority. Perhaps this has contributed to the misunderstanding some have regarding the Deity of each Person in the Trinity. In our mixed-up society that has become sympathetic to the Feminist agenda, subjection and inferiority are often associated as going hand in hand. If a woman is in subjection to her husband, she is considered by many to be acknowledging her inferiority to him. Subjection in a marriage no more suggests inferiority in a relationship than it does between a bank loan officer and the branch manager. Both the loan officer and branch manager have an important role to perform, and without subjection on the part of one, the work would not be efficiently completed. Likewise, the role the Father performed in the redemption process does not suggest His superiority above the Son and Holy Spirit (John 10:30; 1 John 5:7), but rather a Divine cooperation and mutual acceptance of the various roles that were necessary to bring about the redemption of God's MVC (Most Valuable Creation).

Paul emphasized the Father's work in the redemption of man when he wrote, "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, **according to the will of God and our Father**" (Gal. 1:4). The apostle John penned, "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). And finally, we read in the Ephesian letter:

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose **which he purposed** in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11).

Without that which the Father *wrought*, redemption would have only been a fantasy in the minds of sin-cursed men.

The Son Bought It

The role of the Son in the redemption of mankind was to buy back that which had been stolen from the Godhead through sin. What Adam lost in Eden, Christ bought back at Calvary. Paul reminded the Corinthian church of the great transaction Christ made when he exhorted, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20). And then again, “Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men” (1 Cor. 7:23). The Apostle Peter described certain false teachers in the church who had denied “the Lord that bought them,” and would bring upon themselves swift destruction (2 Pet. 2:1).

The purchase that was made by Christ for our redemption was not in the form of material wealth (Psm. 49:7-8, 15; 1 Pet. 1:18-19), or even by the blood of choice livestock (Heb. 10:4). It was made possible only by the sacrifice of His own life on Calvary (Rev. 5:9). Thus, in assuming His role in our redemption, it was necessary that He willfully leave the glories of Heaven (John 1:1), inhabit the body of a man (John 1:14), experience the hardships and trials of flesh (Heb. 4:15; Acts 3:18), accept an unjust execution sentence (Matt. 4:6; 26:51-54; John 19; Matt. 20:28), and then rise from the dead (1 Cor. 15:3-4) to ascend unto the Father once again (John 16:16-17, 28; Acts 1:9-11).

Whereas the Father *wrought* or set in motion the redemption process, the Son *bought* or made the gift available to humanity. Even from the beginning the Son was involved in bringing redemption to fruition. John described the Son as a “lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). Thus, in the mind of God the Second

Person of the Trinity was making sacrifice even prior to the fall of man and the events on Calvary. This is a difficult concept to grasp by most, but the passage clearly affirms the great price that was paid by Deity on our behalf, even prior to the creation of man. Despite His foreknowledge, God still made man, knowing full well the price that He would one day make (Gen. 1:26). Thanks be to God for the Father who **wrought** our redemption and Son who **bought** it!

The Spirit Taught It

Jesus said to his disciples:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:7-8).

The Greek word translated expedient is *sumferei*. It carries with it the idea of an advantage gained. Christ assured His disciples that it was to their advantage that He leave so that the Spirit might fulfill His role in their redemption by building upon the foundation of the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit's redemptive role was didactic. He would "**reprove the world of sin.**" Whereas obedience and righteousness are in harmony with the Godhead, sin and unrighteousness are in direct opposition to the Trinity's very nature and purpose.

The Holy Spirit would therefore assume the role and work of a teacher. He would teach mankind how to regain and maintain that fellowship that was lost due to transgression and rebellion. Originally the Holy Spirit taught through miraculous means by the indwelling of inspired men (John 14:26; 15:26). Once the written Word

was completed and confirmed by the miraculous, the Holy Spirit continued to teach through the non-miraculous avenue of the completed written Word of God (1 Cor. 13:9-11; 1 Tim. 4:1; Eph. 6:17). He provides every generation all things that pertain unto life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3), and enables the man of God to stand perfect and thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17). What the Father **wrought** and the Son **bought**, the Spirit has now **taught**!

The Devil Fought It

Although this lecture is specifically designed to discuss the work of the Godhead in man's redemption, it is necessary that we notice briefly the great rebel and original law breaker who contributed to man's fall from God's fellowship. By name he is called Satan (Job 1; Matt. 4:10), the Devil (1 Peter 5:8; Rev. 2:10) or Beelzebub (Matt. 12:24). He is an highly intelligent creature who used his abilities to corrupt and deceive mankind. Through deception, he has taken over man's dominion of the world that God gave. Using his cleverness, he influenced Eve in the Garden and initiated the events of the greatest tragedy in the history of the world (2 Cor. 11:3). He is **the thief** of all thieves, stealing first the very soul and immortality of man, and then taking man's God given earthly home as his own den of sin and iniquity.

Power has the potential to corrupt, and the prince of darkness gained the power of death by means of man's transgression. But what the Devil gained, the Trinity has broken. David wrote:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto
whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in
whose spirit there is no guile (Psm. 32:1-2).

Spurgeon refers to **transgression, sin and iniquity** as the three-headed dog barking at the gates of hell. But to the Christian, the barking has been silenced. For the trinity of sin has been overcome by the Trinity of heaven. John wrote, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). And then in the Apocalypse we read, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). What a beautiful sentiment John offers to those struggling Christians enduring the persecutions of the Roman empire. That tree of life that was taken away from the Garden because of Satan through sin, is now given back by God through Christ. Oh, yes, the Devil **fought** our redemption and continues to this day (1 Pet. 5:8), but “thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57).

The People Sought It

Redemption is only given to those who desire it so much that they accept God’s grace on God’s terms. Jesus is pictured in Revelation 3:20 as standing and knocking at a door and desiring entrance into the lives of humanity. Yet the picture of fellowship described is only offered to the those who open the door. God will not drag us into the room of fellowship kicking and screaming. Christ said, “Whosoever will let him come...” (Mark 8:34). John wrote, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). Truly it is an invitation and not a draft notice. But who would resist such a gift as the one God offers to humanity? Many have and many do (Matt. 7:13-14). Some reject it by making frivolous choices in life. Like the rich young ruler they choose carnal and temporal desires over spiritual and eternal blessings (Matt. 19:16-23). Yet others

reject God's gift by rejecting God's terms of redemption. We often point to the 3,000 conversions at Pentecost as a marvelous beginning for the church, and it was. But let us not forget that although 3,000 accepted God's terms and grace, many thousands more rejected His invitation, some perhaps out of ignorance and others out of pure rebellion, but regardless of the reason, the result was still the same. Apart from accepting God's grace on God's terms, one is hopelessly lost in sin.

Despite the rejection of many, there have always been a few who have accepted God's gift of redemption (Matt. 7:14; 9:7; 20:16; Luke 13:23-24; Rev. 3:4). The Bible is full of examples of individuals from all walks of life who have abandoned sin and illicit life-styles and chosen redemption through Christ. We remember the words of Paul to Christians in Corinth, who after describing a number of sins and perverted life-styles said, "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" (1 Cor. 6:11). And perhaps one of the greatest examples of conversion in history was this same man, Paul, who referred to himself as simply the "**chief**" of all sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Yet he experienced a marvelous and amazing change when he accepted God's grace on God's terms (Acts 22:16). His conversion should be a reminder to all that sometimes the most unlikely candidate for Christianity will be the very one who accepts God's gift of redemption.

The redemption of mankind through the work of the Godhead is a subject of utmost importance. It was the Father who **wrought** it, the Son who **bought** it, the Spirit who **taught** it, the Devil who **fought** it, but the people still **sought** it and continue to seek it even today. So great and marvelous is the gift of redemption that even

the angels themselves are intrigued and amazed (1 Pet. 1:12). Truly we can sing, “Amazing grace how sweet the sound.” May we never take the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for granted, and may we always live lives worthy of the redemption that has been gained!

CHAPTER 7

THE TRIUNE NATURE OF GOD

MIKE VESTAL

Introduction

THUS SAYS THE LORD: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the Lord (Jer. 9:23-24).

The knowledge of God is the highest and most holy of all pursuits (Prov. 9:10). Nothing will so humble and expand the mind as the study of God. The two greatest questions impacting this life and eternity are, “Do I really know God?” and “Does God know me as His child?”¹

In regard to the first question, because God is infinite and perfect and we are finite and imperfect, we can never fully understand God. He is incomprehensible in the sense that if we were able to understand Him fully and exhaustively, we would have to be God ourselves! So it is readily admitted that man’s finite knowledge cannot completely comprehend all that is embodied in the term “God.” His greatness is too great for us to fully understand; it is “unsearchable” (Psm. 145:3). His “understanding is infinite” (Psm. 147:5).

David, when thinking of God's knowledge of all his ways, would exclaim, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it" (Psm. 139:6). The greatness of God would cause Paul to break forth into praise: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

So while we can and must know something about God, we can never know anything about Him exhaustively. We are to be continually "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). This means we will never be able to learn "too much" about Him, for there is always more to learn. How exciting this truth should be! We should never tire in delighting to discover more and more of His excellence and greatness (2 Pet. 3:18).²

Even though we cannot know God exhaustively, we truly can and must know Him. And this is possible because God has revealed Himself to us. God has chosen to reveal Himself through creation and nature (Rom. 1:18-20; Psm. 19:1). And He has chosen to reveal Himself through the special revelation of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21).

An important distinction must be considered: it is **God Himself** whom we are to know, not simply facts about Him or things He does. To be intellectually informed about an individual is not synonymous with having a close and intimate relationship with them. Relationship is pivotal in actually knowing God. As essential as a proper understanding of God's attributes and actions are, there is a rightful distinction to be made. A person may know about God without knowing Him, but one cannot know Him without knowing about Him (cf. John 17:3; Phil. 3:10; Heb. 8:11; 1 John 5:20). God desires us to love Him with the totality of our being (Mark 12:30). More than anything, do **we** desire to know

Him deeply and richly? God surely longs for us to have that desire (Matt. 11:28-30; 1 Tim. 2:4). And another thing is sure too. **You and I are at this very moment as close to God as we have chosen to be!**

That brings us to the second question, “Does God know me?” Does He know us as his children? (Matt. 7:21-23; 2 Tim. 2:19). Does He consider us faithful? (1 Pet. 3:12). The answers to these two questions determine where we are presently in life as well as where we will be eternally. God does expect us to know Him (Gal. 4:9), and He does not ask the impossible of us (1 John 5:3). Everything depends upon our knowledge of God and upon our loving obedience to Him (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Even if one understands the existence and attributes of God, one still would not understand God as completely as one ought, for we would not understand that God, in His very being, has always existed as more than one person. The word **Trinity** has reference to “tri-unity” or to “three-in-oneness.”³ The doctrine of the Trinity may be defined as follows:

God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God,
and there is but one God.⁴

The doctrine of the triune nature of God is not a doctrine of mere human speculation, but a teaching of divine revelation: it is deeply embedded in Scripture.⁵ In one sense, the doctrine of the Trinity is something of a mystery. By “mystery,” it is meant that it goes beyond the boundaries of human understanding.⁶ Therefore, no analogy nor illustration can convey the fact of the Trinity with the accuracy to be desired. But again, we can understand something of the truthfulness of the doctrine of the Trinity by summarizing the teaching of

Scripture in three statements: (1) God is three persons; (2) Each person is fully God; and, (3) There is but one God.⁷ Error results when one fails to balance these three statements, or by actually denying any of them as Biblically true.⁸

How tragic it is that there are those who wrest the Scriptures concerning the triune nature of God (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16). Christians have been commanded to “prove all things” and “hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). To effectively do this one must have a fervent desire to study God’s Word in order to receive it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13; Acts 17:11).

The Oneness Of God

The word “God” is the appellation in the Scriptures for the one divine essence or being. Numerous passages throughout the Bible attest the unity or oneness of the Godhead, proving that God’s Word stands opposed not only to atheism, but to polytheism as well. “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4). “I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside Me” (Isa. 45:5). Paul told the Corinthians, “But to us there is but one God” (1 Cor. 8:6). In 1 Timothy 2:5 it is written, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” James 2:19 says, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe-and tremble!” Such passages clearly show that God is one in essence or being.

The Godhead is not three separate spirit essences, or tritheistic in nature. Tritheism is actually a form of polytheism and denies the unity of three equal persons in the one divine essence known as God. It contends that there are three distinct Gods, as different as father, mother, and child, who have unity only in the sense of

purpose or will. Tritheism views the Godhead simply as a glorified business partnership, for in such there is unity of operation but not of essence.⁹ This is not the case, for within the Godhead there exists not only unity of purpose and will, but unity of essence or being as well. If tritheism is true, Jesus erred when He claimed, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). In this verse, Jesus used the neuter word for “one” (*hen*), which indicates both the Father and Jesus were one in essence, being, or nature.¹⁰ Roy Lanier, Sr. summarizes the Biblical data concerning the oneness of God:

When we speak of the unity of God, we have in mind two things: (1) that there is but one infinite, eternal, self-existent Being, one essence, and (2) that this one essence is undivided and indivisible.¹¹

Within The One Spirit Essence Are Three Distinct Persons

While there can be no doubt that God is one, there is just as positive Biblical teaching to the effect that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Note the following comment:

We do not affirm that one God is three Gods; we affirm that there is but one infinite Spirit Being, but within that one Spirit essence are three personal distinctions, each of which may be, and is, called God; each capable of loving and being loved by the others; each having a distinct, but not separate, part to play in the creation of the universe, and in the creation and salvation of man.¹²

In the Old Testament many intimations are given relative to the plurality of persons in the Trinity, with

these becoming clearer as the New Testament sheds light on them. In the opening verse of the Bible one reads, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The word for “God” in this verse is the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which is plural in number. This word is found well over two thousand times in the Old Testament. As one writer stated:

The fact which principally requires our attention, is the constant use of *Elohim*, to designate the one and only God. It is not a little remarkable that, in the sacred books of a people who were separated from all other nations for this express object, viz. That they should bear a public and continual protest against polytheism—the ordinary name and style of the only living and true God should be in plural form. Did some strange and insuperable necessity lie in the way? Was the language so poor that it could furnish no other term? Or, if so, could not the language of inspiration have suggested a new appellative, and for ever abolish the hazardous word?¹³

If one accepts the inspiration of the Scriptures, then one must come to the conclusion that God used the exact word He intended. The Bible used a word that conveyed the unity of the one God, yet allowed for a plurality of persons. This is further borne out by the fact that the form *Elohim* occurs only in Hebrew and in no other Semitic language, not even Biblical Aramaic.¹⁴

Plural pronouns in the Hebrew text also indicate a plurality of persons within the Godhead. In Genesis 1:26 God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Just who is the “us” and “our” of this passage? As Gleason Archer observed, “It could hardly include the angels in consultation with God, for nowhere is it

ever stated that man was created in the image of angels, only of God.”¹⁵ The Bible truly serves as its own best commentator. In Genesis 1:2, the Holy Spirit is mentioned as being active in the creative work. It is also clear that the Father must have been speaking to Jesus in Genesis 1:26, for John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:16 both declare Christ’s activity in the creation of the universe. Along with Genesis 1:26, Genesis 3:22, Genesis 11:7 and Isaiah 6:8 are examples of other passages where through plural pronouns it is implied that more than one person is involved when the text is plainly speaking of God.¹⁶

In Psalm 45:6-7 the Word of God says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. . . You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness. . .” This psalm goes beyond anything that could be said of any earthly king when it calls the one on the throne, “God.” Further, this ruler’s throne will last “forever and ever.” This could only apply to God. But also note the reference to “God, Your God.” It is evident from this text that two separate persons are called “God” (*Elohim*). Interestingly enough, this passage is quoted by the author of Hebrews, where he applies it to Christ: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Heb. 1:8).

Psalm 110:1 says, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” Jesus correctly interprets this passage to say that David is referring to two separate persons as “Lord” (Matt. 22:41-46), but who is David’s “Lord” if not God Himself? And when Jesus asked the Pharisees to explain this passage, “no one was able to answer Him a word” (Matt. 22:46). The failure of the Pharisees on this occasion was due to their obvious reluctance to come to grips with the truth about the Deity of Christ. Who could be saying

to God, “sit on My right hand,” except one who is fully God? Grudem properly notes, “From a New Testament perspective, we can paraphrase this verse: ‘God the Father said to God the Son, Sit at my right hand.’”¹⁷

In Isaiah 48:16, the speaker (apparently the servant of the Lord), says, “And now the Lord God and His Spirit Have sent Me.” From a New Testament perspective, the “Me” of this passage is obviously Jesus (cf. 42:1-13; 61:1-2; Luke 4:17-21; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). If this is indeed so, one would be hard pressed to show how this passage does not have Trinitarian implications.

As Benjamin Warfield remarked:

If we find some difficulty in perceiving for ourselves, in the Old Testament, definite points of attachment for the revelation of the Trinity, we cannot help perceiving with greater clearness in the New Testament abundant evidence that its writers felt no incongruity whatever in their doctrine of the Trinity and the Old Testament conception of God. The New Testament writers certainly were not conscious of being “setters forth of strange gods.”¹⁸

Warfield goes on to add concerning the New Testament writers:

Obviously they understand themselves, and wish to be understood, as setting forth in the Father, Son and Spirit just the one God that the God of the Old Testament revelation is; and they as far as possible from recognizing any breach between themselves and the Fathers in presenting their enlarged conception of the Divine Being. This may not amount to saying that they saw the doctrine of the Trinity everywhere taught in the Old

Testament. It certainly amounts to saying that they saw the Triune God whom they worshipped in the God of the Old Testament revelation, and felt no incongruity in speaking of their Triune God in the terms of the Old Testament revelation. The God of the Old Testament was their God, and their God was a Trinity, and their sense of the identity of the two was so complete that no question as to it was raised in their minds.¹⁹

In the New Testament one can find the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit present on the same occasion. For instance, when Christ was baptized, the Father spoke from heaven acknowledging Jesus as His beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit is seen descending like a dove upon the Lord (Matt. 3:16-17). In 2 Corinthians 13:14, Paul states, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” The inspired writer represents Jesus here as exercising grace, the Father as exercising love, and the Holy Spirit as having communion or fellowship. Jesus surely recognized the triune nature of God when He commanded the apostles to baptize into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Note that in each of these passages three persons are depicted, not three “manifestations” of the same person, as the Oneness Pentecostals contend. The terminology of these passages would not only be redundant but ridiculous if there is only one person in the Godhead.²⁰

The Deity Of Christ

The distinctive truth of Christianity is grounded in the fact that Jesus Christ is Deity. The word “deity” comprehends the attributes, characteristics, and prerogatives which can only be used to describe God. In affirming the Deity of Christ, one is affirming that

Jesus is eternal God in every sense.

Numerous Old Testament prophecies plainly teach the Deity of Jesus. In Isaiah 7:14, the prophecy was given that the virgin would conceive and bear a son, and that his name would be called “Immanuel.” Matthew 1:22-23 comments on this very verse and tells us that the name Immanuel means, “God with us.” Wayne Jackson has written concerning Isaiah 7:14:

From this reference Jesus’ deity can be concluded in two ways: first, the land of Palestine was said to belong to Immanuel (Isaiah 8:8), but the land was God’s, hence, Immanuel was God. Secondly, Matthew’s use of the title asserts the deity of Christ (1:23). He announced that it meant “God with us.” Though the use of “God” in a compound name would not necessarily demand the deity of the person named, Matthew’s use indicated it did in the case of Christ. Remember, Matthew was writing for Jews who would not need “Immanuel” interpreted for them; but he did, and this was to emphasize that with the Lord’s birth, deity had come to earth.²¹

The prophet Isaiah also refers to Jesus as “mighty God” and “everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6). Jehovah’s Witnesses, in order to uphold their erroneous contention that Christ was a created being, state that Jesus is a “mighty god,” but certainly not Almighty God. This argument is negated by the fact that “mighty God” is associated with “Jehovah” in Isaiah 10:21 and Jeremiah 32:18 in the Witnesses’ own *New World Translation*. Also, the Hebrew term for God in this verse denotes in Isaiah “divinity in an absolute sense; it is never used hyperbolically or metaphorically.”²² Isaiah is plainly identifying Jesus as God. The expression, “everlasting

Father” (literally, “Father of eternity”; see ASV footnote), designates Christ not only as One who possesses eternity, but also as One who is a faithful guardian and provider for His people.²³ Only Deity is capable of fulfilling the implications of such a title.

When Micah prophesied concerning the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, he was careful to stress that Christ’s goings forth are “from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). It is evident from the context that the Lord’s eternal goings forth are put in contrast to His coming forth as a child in Bethlehem of Judea. It would be difficult to imagine the prophet’s intention in using such terminology if they mean anything less than the eternal pre-existence of Christ.

The final book of the Old Testament contains a prophecy which points to the Deity of Christ:

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts (Mal. 3:1).

Leon Crouch offers the following comment on this passage:

The messenger spoken of by Malachi was to clear the way before the Lord Himself. The Lord is the understood antecedent of the pronoun, “Me.” When the way has been prepared, the Lord will suddenly, that is, unexpectedly, come. “The Lord” here is God. We can be sure of this because the Hebrew word is *adon* and is used with the article. When so used, it always refers to God. In addition to the word *adon*, the context points to the same

conclusion. The mention of the fact that “the messenger of the covenant. . . is coming” confirms the identification. “The Messenger of the covenant” is another reference to the Lord (adon). The parallelism of the clauses makes this identification beyond doubt.²⁴

It is evident from the New Testament that Jesus spoke and acted like God, for all the attributes of God are ascribed to Him or claimed by Him. To the high priest, Jesus replied “I am” when asked, “Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” (Mark 14:63-64). In John 8:58, Jesus said, “Verily, verily I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” Guy N. Woods makes an excellent comment regarding this verse:

The verbs here are quite significant. That with reference to Abraham signifies to *begin*, to *come to be*; that of Christ, to *be evermore existing*. There was a point in history when Abraham came into existence; before this, he was not; but of Christ it is affirmed that he always existed. The tense is timeless present and conveys the same notion as that used of Jehovah when he said, “I am that I am” (Exod. 3:14). It should be observed that Jesus did not say, “Before Abraham was I *was*,” though this would have positioned him in history at a point prior to Abraham; this would have suggested he had a beginning, even though before Abraham’s. As it stands, unlike Abraham, who came to be, the Lord is uncreated, always existing, and thus wholly independent of time.²⁵

Jesus accepted the worship of men (John 9:38), something He Himself claimed should only be rendered unto God (Matt. 4:10). If Jesus were simply a good man (Acts 10:24-25) or an angel (Rev. 22:8-9), He would not

have allowed others to worship Him, for such action would have constituted idolatry. He is either God, or else He is a liar, a madman, or both!

Christ forgave the sins of others, a prerogative of Deity (Mark 2:5-9). The Jews understood that only God can forgive, or blot out, sin completely (Isa. 44:22); therefore, because of the hardness of their hearts they believed Jesus to be guilty of blasphemy. While Jesus could and did forgive the sins of others, it is also clear that He was without sin (John 8:46; 1 Pet. 2:21-22). Here is yet another attribute of God given specifically to Jesus.

A number of times in the New Testament Jesus is plainly called God. That Christ is indeed God is emphatically set forth in John 1:1-3, a passage that causes those who deny the Deity of Christ no little trouble.²⁶ In John 20:28, Thomas addressed Jesus as “My Lord and my God.” If Thomas had erred in so designating Jesus, surely the Lord would have rebuked him. Paul tells us that in Christ “all” things were created, that He is before “all” things, and in Him “all” things consist (Col. 1:16-17). It would be difficult to find a plainer passage with regard to His Deity. In the same Epistle, Paul goes on to say that in Christ dwells “all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). Christ is “the One in whom the plenitude of deity is embodied.”²⁷ In Acts 20:28, Paul exhorts the elders of the church at Ephesus to “feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” How obvious it is that this is the blood of Christ, the very Son of God! (Matt. 26:28; Eph. 1:7). Hebrews 1:2-3 speak of Jesus as the “heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right

hand of the Majesty on high.” The author refers to Jesus as the “exact representation” or “exact duplicate” of the nature or being (Gk. *hypostasis*) of God. One would have to suffer from outright bias or delusion to deny the overwhelming weight of Biblical evidence that supports the Deity of Jesus.

The Deity Of The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is neither an “it” nor merely an “influence” or “God’s active force.” The language employed in the Scriptures clearly declares the Holy Spirit to be a Person. Christ said to the apostles:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:26).

But when the Comforter is come, whom I send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceeds from the Father, He shall testify of me” (John 15:26).

In these verses it is significant that Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “He” (a personal pronoun, masculine gender, singular number). In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit says, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

Concerning the use of personal pronouns in reference to the Holy Spirit, the following comment has been made:

He is introduced as a person so often, not merely in poetic or excited discourse, but in simple narrative, and in didactic instructions; and his

personality is sustained by so many collateral proofs, that to explain the use of the personal pronouns in relation to Him on the principle of personification, is to do violence to all the rules of interpretation.²⁸

The Holy Spirit exhibits the characteristics of a person. The Holy Spirit has a **mind** (Rom. 8:27); He has **knowledge** (1 Cor. 2:11) and **volition** or **will** (1 Cor. 12:11). The Holy Spirit also **loves** (Rom. 15:30). He has feelings and can be **grieved** (Eph. 4:30), **resisted** (Acts 7:51), **lied to** (Acts 5:3-4), and **blasphemed** (Matt. 12:31-32). Only a person could have such characteristics.²⁹

The works and actions of the Holy Spirit also clearly indicate that He is a person. He **speaks** (1 Tim. 4:1; John 16:13). This is something an “influence” simply cannot do. He is also said to **testify** (John 15:26), to **guide** (John 16:13), to **search** (1 Cor. 2:10-11), to **reveal** (Eph. 3:4-5), and to **intercede** (Rom. 8:26).

The Holy Spirit is not only a person, but by virtue of the divine attributes ascribed to Him, He is God. The Bible reveals the eternal nature of the Holy Spirit:

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).

The Holy Spirit is omniscient:

But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11).

The Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit's omnipresence (Psm. 139:7-10). The Holy Spirit is also omnipotent. Paul performed "mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God" (Rom. 15:19). Luke 1:35 informs us that the virgin birth of Christ was by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Further evidence of the Deity of the Holy Spirit can be seen as the Bible refers to Him in a number of passages along with the Father and the Son. For example, He is mentioned: (1) at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17); (2) in the giving of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20); (3) in the benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14; and, (4) in Ephesians 4:4-6. Other references could easily be cited, but these offer conclusive proof regarding the Deity of the Holy Spirit.

The Importance Of The Doctrine Of The Trinity

Is the doctrine of the Trinity really such a big deal? Does the doctrine really matter? Absolutely! The Trinity is central to Christianity and indispensable to saving faith. But why? First, the Trinity is an essential aspect of God's answer to Who He is and what He is like. We dare not ignore anything He has revealed about Himself if we truly love Him and desire to obey Him. Second, the personal nature and independence of God are at stake. If there is no Trinity, it is difficult to see how God could be genuinely personal or be without the need for a creation to relate to. God did not create all because He **had to**; He did it because He **chose to**!

The matter of salvation also is at stake. If Jesus were merely a man, even a "special" one, it would have been utterly impossible for Him as a creature to have borne the wrath of God in dying for our sins (Acts 4:12; 2 Cor. 5:21). If Jesus were anything less than God, would

we not be guilty of idolatry to ascribe to Him the worship and praise that belong only to God? (Matt. 4:10). Fourth, the inspiration and authority of Scripture are at stake. There are just too many plain passages concerning the oneness of God on the one hand, and the threeness of God on the other, to try to explain them away. Nothing in religion or out of it comes close to paralleling the Triune nature of God as revealed in the Bible. Such a teaching is absolutely unique to Christianity. The real question is, “Will I believe and embrace God’s inspired Word even when its teaching is, at least to some degree, beyond my human comprehension?”

Fifth, the doctrine of the Trinity is also crucial to the area of hermeneutics, as well as a test of the meaningfulness of religious terminology. We are admonished to “handle aright” God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). We certainly do not want to be wrong in our understanding of God. An issue like the Trinity forces those who love God to be as Biblically precise and balanced as possible in order to avoid misunderstanding, inaccuracy and improper teaching.

But lastly, the matter of the Trinity is an extremely important one because of the decline of solid doctrine in far too many churches. In our “seeker friendly” age, many would argue that people will not come to worship to hear a sermon on a “dry” topic like the Trinity. I believe the opposite to be true. While some may have an aversion to doctrine, and a perverted concept of civility that causes them to avoid making much ado about anything, the Trinity has to do with God; therefore, no greater theme could be contemplated. One can and must preach the great themes of Scripture in a way that perpetually shows their greatness and relevance. Too many sermons today lack meat and depth. Cute outlines and illustrations are no substitute for communicating

well the Word of God! Someone has rightly said of those who preach, “Skeletons in the pulpit (bare bones outlines) produce cadavers in the pews.”

Conclusion

It is true that there is but one God, one Essence, but it is also true that within the one essence known as God there is a distinction of persons who stand in a definite relationship with one another-the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Bible upholds the unity of God while plainly teaching God’s triune nature. As someone has said of this doctrine:

Try to explain it, and you’ll lose your mind;
But try to deny it, and you’ll lose your soul.

Endnotes

1 Both J.I. Packer’s **Knowing God** (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973) and Richard Mayhue’s **Spiritual Intimacy** (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1990), despite strong Calvinistic slants in some places, are eminently practical works in helping one come to a deeper appreciation of the priority of knowing God.

2 Wayne Grudem’s **Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), has a helpful chapter entitled, “**The Knowability of God**” (pp. 150-153).

3 Helpful treatments of the Trinity may be found in standard theologies. Among the more helpful are Grudem (pp. 226-259), Millard Erickson’s **Christian Theology** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), pp. 312-342, and Loraine Boettner’s **Studies in Theology** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), pp. 79-139. Especially worth mentioning is Jack Cottrell’s **What The Bible Says About God The Redeemer** (Joplin: College Press, 1987), pp. 117-174.

4 Grudem, p. 226.

5 Two books by brethren on the subject of the Trinity are

deserving of special mention. Roy Lanier, Sr.'s **The Timeless Trinity for the Ceaseless Centuries** (Priv. Pub., 1974) is worthy of any Christian's time and serious study. Also, **Doctrine of the Godhead**, by J.J. Turner and Edward P. Myers (West Monroe: Let the Bible Speak, Inc., 1973), is a compact volume loaded with a considerable amount of information. Among those considering themselves "evangelical," two recent studies of note are, Millard J. Erickson's **God In Three Persons, A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) and Robert Morey's **The Trinity, Evidence and Issues** (Grand Rapids: Word, 1996).

6 See Kenneth Boa's **Unraveling the Big Questions About God** (Zondervan: Lamplighter Books, revised edition, 1988), pp. 8-55 for discussion of the Trinity as a "mystery."

7 Grudem, p. 231.

8 For examples of such errors, consider the following: (1) Modalism claims God is one person who appears to us in three different forms or modes, or manifestations. Modern adherents of this view include the so-called, "Oneness Pentecostals." (2) Arianism denies the full Godhood or Deity of the Son or the Holy Spirit. Today, Jehovah's Witnesses are modern-day Arians. They believe Jesus to be simply a created being. They also assert that the Holy Spirit is not a person at all, but merely "God's active force." (3) Subordinationism says that Jesus is eternal, but claims He is not equal in His being or attributes with the Father. Jesus is reduced to a "lesser God." (4) Adoptionism says that Jesus was a man only, although a perfect one, until His baptism, when He was "adopted" as God's Son and conferred with supernatural powers.

9 Augustus H. Strong, **Systematic Theology** (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1979 reprint), pp. 330-332.

10 A.T. Robertson, **Word Pictures In The New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1932), Vol. 5, pp. 186-187.

11 Lanier, p. 45.

12 Lanier, p. 46.

13 Pye Smith, **Scripture Testimony to the Messiah**, as quoted in: Henry Bickersteth's **The Trinity** (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), pp. 145-146.

14 Jack B. Scott, **"Elohim," Theological Wordbook of**

the Old Testament, R. Laird Harris, Ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), Vol. 1, p. 44.

15 Gleason L. Archer, **Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 359.

16 Some have sought to avoid the force of this argument by alleging the use of such pronouns to simply be a figure of speech. They have suggested they are merely “plurals of majesty.” This mistaken notion is soundly answered by Grudem, p. 227, especially in footnotes 2 and 3 on that page.

17 Grudem, p. 228.

18 Benjamin Warfield, “**The Trinity**,” **The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, James Orr, Ed., (Wilmington, Delaware: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1915 reprint), Vol. 5, p. 3014.

19 Warfield, p. 3014-3015.

20 Highly recommended in dealing with Oneness Pentecostals on the subject of the Godhead are the following debates involving brethren: **The Ramsey-Hicks Debate**, (Fort Worth: Star Bible, 1973), **The Wallace-Vaughn Debate** (Shreveport: Lambert Book House, 1978), **The Godhead - One or Three?**, a debate between Wayne Jackson and Paul Ferguson, and **The Cotham-Davis Debate on The Godhead and Miracles Today** (Mesquite, TX: Precision Graphics, 1988).

21 Wayne Jackson, “**Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Doctrine of the Deity of Christ**” (Stockton, CA: Priv. Pub., 1979), p. 15.

22 G. Rawlinson, “**Isaiah**,” **The Pulpit Commentary**, H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell, Eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), Vol. 10, pp. 166-167.

23 Leon Crouch, **The Deity of Christ** (Fort Worth: Star Bible and Tract Corporation, 1977), pp. 7-10.

24 Crouch, pp. 12-13.

25 Guy N. Woods, **New Testament Commentary On John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1981) p. 181.

26 For an excellent refutation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ deliberate mistranslation of this passage in their **New World Translation**, see: Roy Deaver, “**The Person of Christ**,” **The Spiritual Sword** (October, 1974), 6:1, pp. 4-11. See also Robert

H. Countess, **The Jehovah's Witnesses' New Testament** (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 41-59.

27 F.F. Bruce, "Colossians," **The New International Commentary on the New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 232.

28 Charles Hodge, **Systematic Theology** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), Vol. 1, p. 524.

29 Z.T. Sweeney's **The Spirit and the Word** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, n.d.), pp. 37-39. Though dated, this book is still a useful resource in the study of the person of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 8

THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD

DANIEL DENHAM

Introduction

THE GREATEST SINGLE THOUGHT which mortal minds have ever contemplated is “God Is!” From this fundamental proposition flows every other meaningful thought, idea, purpose, plan, and act of humanity. Life has no significance whatsoever without its truth. To think about God is to think about the sublime, the eternal, things which will lift up the spirit of man (the spark of the Divine in each of us), and things that matter most.

Involved in the very concept of God is the question of His ultimate nature and essence. “Who God is” must be defined somewhat by the qualities, characteristics, and capacities of His nature and essence. What God can do, has done, is doing, or shall do must be seen in the light of these things. One vital aspect of all of these considerations is the matter of God’s **omniscience**. The doctrine of the omniscience of God is closely related to and somewhat inter-dependent with the doctrine of the omnipresence of God. Each presupposes the other by virtue of this relationship. Often passages in the Bible which establish the truth of the one invariably prove the other to be true as well, yet they are each distinct doctrines in their own right. As Stephen Charnock properly observes in his fundamental work *The Existence and Attributes of God*, “Omnipresence...respects His (God’s, HDD) essence;

omniscience respects His understanding, according to our manner of conception.”¹

The format for the current study will concentrate on the following points: (1) The Definition of Omniscience as Applied to God; (2) The Proof of the Doctrine from the Testimony of the Scriptures; and (3) Some Practical Implications Involved in Its Truth. In examining the definition and proof of the doctrine, I intend also to consider very briefly the primary objection often raised by skeptics and others against the doctrine.

The Definition Of Omniscience As Applied To God

The word “omniscience” is derived by the combining of the Latin prefix “*omnis*,” meaning “all,” and the Latin verb “*scire*,” meaning “to know.” Our English word “science” comes from this latter term and forms the stem of the word “omniscience.” It refers to the capacity of “knowing all things.”²

In the case of God, this characteristic **must** be infinite in nature and scope. For God to be God in any real and meaningful sense, He must be infinite in all of His attributes. As Mac Deaver states:

God must have every attribute to the infinite degree because if He does not have all attributes to that degree, He is only a finite being. If God had all attributes except one to the infinite degree and had that one attribute to only a finite degree, He would still be a finite being. A being cannot be an infinite being and be finite in a single attribute. This is impossible. But God cannot be God (the ultimate principle of the universe) and be a finite being.

He then explains:

To be a finite being means that one is a contingent being (dependent upon something else outside itself for its own existence), and a contingent being is thus of necessity a created being. And a created being cannot possibly be the creator. So, if God is finite in even one attribute, He just cannot exist.

He forcefully and correctly concludes, “To argue for a God who is not infinite in knowledge is to argue (although unknowingly) for the non-existence of God.”³

Following an examination of several passages bearing on the subject, Thomas N. Ralston in his *Elements of Divinity* writes:

Thus, we perceive clearly that God possesses the attribute of knowledge in the highest possible perfection. With Him there can be nothing difficult, nothing mysterious; but all things are alike plain to His understanding and open to His view.⁴

“This perfect knowledge,” he goes on to add:

is restricted to no particular part of His dominions, but extends alike to heaven, earth, and hell; yea, throughout the illimitable bounds of immensity. Nor may we suppose that it is applied only to things which, according to the judgment of finite capacities, are of consequence and importance. It extends to all things, great and small. The insect, as well as the angel, is perfectly known in all its mysterious organization and minute history.⁵

The affirmation of God’s omniscience logically involves His knowledge of everything knowable, including

Himself, the universe, and all things possible and actual. “Literally and absolutely,” writes W.N. Clarke, “God has perfect knowledge of all.”⁶ Ralston notes:

The infinite knowledge of God not only comprehends every thing, great and small, whether animate or inanimate, material or immaterial, throughout the immensity of space, but also throughout the infinite periods of duration. All things, past and future, are just as clearly seen, and as fully comprehended, by the omniscient God, as the plainest events of the present.⁷

This touches upon the subject of God’s “fore-knowledge,” i.e., His knowledge “before-hand” of events yet future from human perspective. The phrase itself is accommodative to the finitude of man. The essence of “fore-knowledge” is God’s knowledge (period). As pertaining to human choices and actions, it simply means that God “foresees” (knows) what man will **freely** — in a real and meaningful sense — choose to do or not do!

Some, particularly atheists, object to the idea of “omniscience,” because of the errors of Calvinism and on the basis of “free will.” The question of foreknowledge often occasions among philosophers and theologians, especially those who are predisposed to skepticism as to God’s existence, objection to the general doctrine of divine omniscience. They reason that to foreknow an event is to happen is the same as actively to cause it to happen. Hence, when God foresees that a man is going to commit murder, and when the one commits that murder, then God is culpably responsible as an active cause for that murder. However, to know beforehand what will most certainly happen does not **necessarily** mean the same thing as to compel it to happen against or despite the free will of the

perpetrator; no, not any more than after knowledge (memory) requires of the possessor some moral responsibility in causing it to happen. It does not follow that God compels one to sin, and is thus the author of sin. This is because the essence of foreknowledge is just that — knowledge! God’s knowledge is actual, not theoretical or conditional. He cannot be God and yet not know!

Some seeking to avoid the fallacies of Calvinism have devised the view that God in some fashion limits His knowledge. He “chooses” not to know certain things. But, to contend that God has “chosen” not to know certain things, (e.g. the specific moral choices or actions of men) logically *implies* two absurdities: (1) the idea that God “knows how to not know,” as Mac Deaver humorously terms it⁸, and (2) some form of **self-imposed** amnesia on the part of God. As God, He at some point had to know, but now does not know what men will choose to do. This requires some means of “forgetting” (hence, amnesia) what He, of the greatest certainty, formerly knew to be the case! Further consideration should be given to a study of the lecture dealing with the specific lecture on foreknowledge in the book. Suffice it now to say, that God’s knowledge must be absolute and infinite.

The Proof Of The Omniscience Of God From The Testimony Of The Scriptures

The essential attribute of omniscience is quite clearly and forcefully presented in the Sacred Scriptures. David in Psalm 139:1-4 extols the knowledge of God. He writes:

O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me.
Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine
uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar
off. Thou compassest my path and my lying
down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For

there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord,
Thou knowest it altogether.

He adds in verse 12 that to God “the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike” to Him. Now read verses 13-16 carefully. David declares therein:

For Thou has possessed my reins: Thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

God knew who David was, and saw him conceived, and He knew the members (parts) of his physical body before they even existed! In Psalm 147:5, David proclaims, “Great is our Lord, and of great power: His understanding is infinite.” In his advice to Solomon, he says:

And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: **for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts...** (1 Chron. 28:9, emp. mine, HDD).

Solomon, in the book of Proverbs, likewise, affirms the comprehensive nature of God’s knowledge. He writes in Proverbs 5:21, “For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He pondereth all His goings.” In Proverbs

15:3 he notes, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.” The “All-Seeing Eye” is ever upon men, carefully examining and considering their ways! Nothing is hidden from Him; nothing is secret to the Mind of God. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

God possesses perfect knowledge of all human experience. On the occasion of the appearance of Jehovah to Abraham on the plains of Mamre in Genesis 18:17-18, the Lord asks: “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?” In verse 19, He then adds:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.

Clearly, the functioning of Abraham as a father over his own household would involve some moral choices and actions. God **knew** that what Abraham would do as a father would be to guide his household in “the way of the Lord,” that they would keep “justice and judgment.” God **knew** that He could count on Abraham to be faithful, and to direct his family likewise! Observe, He knew that such was the case, even though it would involve then-future actions! Jehovah informs Moses in Exodus 3:7, “...I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows.” Thus, He knew of the afflictions suffered by the Hebrews in Egyptian bondage. He equally knew of the rebellion and disobedience of Israel in the time of Isaiah. Isaiah records the Word of the Lord to the

nation to this end, “O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea” (Isa. 48:18). So God knows with equal certitude the good and the evil that we do, and the sufferings and trials that we may endure.

His knowledge even pertains to the certainty of the moral **choices**, which we may make, and actions, which we may do. He knew and prophesied beforehand of the certainty that Pharaoh would not let the people go, until after the miraculous demonstrations of God’s power. Observe His words in Exodus 3:19, “And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand.” Now examine verse 20, which reads, “And I will stretch out My hand, and smite Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.” Such knowledge is absolutely essential to the **credibility** and **certainty** of prophecy. Without this degree of knowledge, prophecy is reduced to a predictive game more comparable to rolling the dice.

In trying to avoid the extreme view of Calvinism and its rejection of genuine free will, some theologians, opting for a limited view of divine omniscience, speak of God in terms that depict Him more as a skilled “chess master,” who is just hoping that everything will turn out the way He says it will!⁹ The fulfillment of the prophecies given by the voice of Jehovah, even unconditional ones, is not a given. Yet God through Moses and the prophets forespoke of Israel’s rebellion against His law, their punishment at the hands of other nations (the Assyrians and Chaldaeans, in particular), and their subsequent “return” from captivity: time and again employing the determinative forms (cf. Deut. 28-31; et.al.).

Isaiah specifically pointed to Cyrus the Great of Persia as the one who would do the Lord’s “pleasure” by issuing the command or edict permitting the Jews to

return from Babylon to rebuild the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem (Isa. 44:28; 45:1ff.). These prophecies were penned over a century and a half before they were fulfilled in Cyrus, and even before Cyrus himself had been born! Jesus knew as well beforehand that Judas Iscariot was the one who would betray Him (Matt. 26:20-25; John 13:21-30), and that Peter would deny Him thrice (Matt. 26:33-34; et.al.).

Prophecy cannot be reduced to Deity's "rolling of the dice" to see how things come out, without some rather unpleasant conclusions, which bear upon the nature and extent of Biblical inspiration itself, following. Jehovah God challenged the idol worshippers of his day, saying:

Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure: calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth My counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it (Isa. 46:8-11).

God declares the end "from the beginning." He does not "guess" concerning what is to come. There must be certitude involved in prophecy, especially in those cases where the prophecy is unconditional. This would require a perfect and infinite knowledge on His part! As the writer of Hebrews declares concerning God, "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" (Heb. 4:13). The Scriptures affirm that even

the secret things of men, hidden from our fellows but not from the eyes of Him “with whom we have to do,” will be made known at the Judgment Bar of God (Eccl. 12:13-14; Luke 8:17; Rom. 2:16; 1 Tim. 6:24-25)

Some Practical Implications Involved In The Truth Of God’s Omniscience

(1) One clear implication of the doctrine of God’s omniscience is that God is fully cognizant of our thoughts and attitudes which motivate or precipitate our actions. He knows assuredly what we are thinking, how we “feel” about certain things, what attitudes or bent of mind we possess toward other people, and what activities we **are planning** to be engaged in, **are** in engaged in, or **have been** engaged in, as we go about our daily business. He knows the true condition of both heart and life.

God knew that “every imagination of the thoughts of” the antediluvians’ hearts “was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5).¹⁰ He also knew David’s “downsittings” and “uprisings,” and was “acquainted” with all his ways (Psm. 139:2-3). The disciples affirmed in prayer in Acts 1:24 that God knows “the hearts of all men...” Of the wicked, God said through Isaiah, “For I know their works and their thoughts...” and then prophesies of their punishment (Isa. 66:18).

Jesus, even though Incarnate, “knew” the thoughts of men (cf. Luke 5:22; 6:8; 9:47). He warned certain, “Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?” (Matt. 9:4). It is, therefore, all the more important that we watch what we think, as well as what we do. Proverbs 4:23 urges, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life,” and Proverbs 16:9 informs in part, “A man’s heart deviseth his way...,” while Proverbs 23:7 reminds also in part, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...” Good, wholesome, and godly thoughts should be cultivated (Phil.

4:8). Good treasures of the heart are the source of good teaching and living (Matt. 12:35).

Every malicious and hateful thought, every immoral and ungodly imagination is open to Him. He knows of each. Each wounds Him, and brings Him inward pain. He told the Hebrews:

And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless,
the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you
imagine evil against his brother in your heart
(Zech. 7:10; cf. 8:17, where it is applied to their
“neighbor”).

They were forbidden from even plotting against their neighbors, much less carrying out the plot! One of the things that Solomon singles out as being a thing the Lord hates is “an evil heart that deviseth wicked imaginations” (Prov. 6:18). David says of the wicked that he “deviseth mischief upon his bed” (Psm. 36:4). Surely, God is aware of such late-night planning of evil-doers! The Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest single statement on ethics ever given, also warns against not only the acts of murder and adultery, but the very thoughts which precipitate them (Matt. 5:21-22,27-28). “So be careful, little heart, what you think,” as a childhood song reminds.

(2) A second practical implication is that God knows what we say. Thus, there is the need to practice some control over the tongue (cf. James 3:1ff). “Death and life are in the power of the tongue...” (Prov. 18:21).

The Lord was aware of the “words” of the false prophets in the time of Jeremiah, and He punished them for their lies. He called them “lying words which cannot profit” (Jer. 7:4,8). He told the people not to “hearken” to their words of peace and deliverance (Jer. 27:16). Jehovah declared that they “have committed villany in Israel, and

have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives," and have spoken "lying words in My name, which I have not commanded them; even I know, and am a witness, saith the Lord" (Jer. 29:23).

God **knew** what they were saying, and He would stand as witness against them! God knows whether or not we are preaching and teaching the truth. We must not shun to "declare the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Peter commands, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). We must be careful with our speech. This is true not only in the teaching of the truth, but in all other forms as well. Listen to the Lord's words in Matthew 12:35-37:

A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Men will give an account for "every idle word," the Master says. Therefore, every particle of our speech demands our rigid control and most fervent concern. Paul exhorts Timothy to be "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12), and he commands him to "shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness" (2 Tim. 2:16). Titus 2:8 admonishes us to practice "sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say" of us.

Paul earnestly admonishes, "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know

how ye ought to answer every man”(Col. 4:6; cf. 1 Peter 3:15). We are to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). Hateful and malicious words, words that engender strife, backbiting, et.al., have no place in the Lord’s Cause:

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:31-32).

God hears every word we speak, even when no one else is near by to hear! Paul enjoins, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another” (Eph. 4:25). Every lie we tell, or truth we defend; every vicious phrase, or kindly expression; every whine of discontent and murmuring, or expression of thankfulness, God hears and knows. Every malicious dig designed to exalt oneself at the expense of another, God observes and considers.

We must avoid filthy, profane, and vulgar speech. Ribald stories, off-color jokes, and lurid and licentious tales ought to be shunned by the people of God. “Let no corrupt communication,” Paul writes, “proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29). “So be careful, little mouth, what you say!”

(3) A third implication is that God is fully aware of our actions, whether they be good or evil. As it is the case that “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3), God cannot help but see all that we do.

God sees all the evil that men commit. He saw Adam and Eve when they ate of the forbidden fruit, and He saw them as they sought to hide themselves amongst the trees

of the Garden! His question, “Where art thou?” in Genesis 3:9, is rhetorical and pedagogic in nature, just as His other queries in verses 11 and 13 are rhetorical and pedagogic, i.e., designed to impress upon the pair their guilt in heeding the words of the serpent. The questions serve together as a line of cross-examination in the process of bringing both Adam and Eve to a fuller understanding of the significance of their transgression.

It is not that God did not know where they were hiding, but that He desired them to face the fact of their own guilt before Him. He had been, and yet was, their Creator and Benefactor. Every blessing they possessed, even that of positive divine law, had come from His good hand toward them, but they had rebelled against His authority. They had demonstrated their distrust of Him, despite every good thing which He had done for them. The question “Where art thou?” entails a very special meaning and force. Against the backdrop of their miraculous creation and God’s wonderful provisions for them, it is a means by which God emphasizes to the guilty pair that He in fact **does know**, not only where they have hidden themselves, but also what they have done which led them to do so!

God knew of the homosexual sins of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and saw that their wickedness was great. He heard the lie that Abraham, out of fear for his mortal life and despite being otherwise a great man of faith, told Pharaoh concerning Sarah. He was cognizant of Nadab and Abihu’s offering of “strange fire.” He observed the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath day. He knew of King Saul’s failure to destroy utterly the Amalekites, as He had directed. He was fully knowledgeable of David’s adultery with Bathsheba and of his successful plot to have Uriah slain to try to cover up the adultery. He also saw David’s “new cart” and the touching of the ark of the

covenant by Uzzah at Nachon's threshingfloor. He saw Ahab on the field of battle before Ramoth-Gilead, even while the rebellious king of Israel was *incognito* in the guise of a common soldier, and He guided the flight of the fateful arrow which struck him down. He knew of Uzziah's haughty attempt to offer incense in the Temple and do that which "pertained not" unto him. He was fully aware as well of Judas' plot to betray Christ. He observed and heard Peter's denials of Christ the same evening Judas' plot was unfolded.

Every evil act in which we may be engaged God knows of it! He knows if one has not obeyed the Gospel of Christ. He knows also when one is unfaithful, and takes careful note of it. He "writes within the book of remembrance, and does not let the pen slip," as one writer expressed it! Revelation 20:15 says, "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." The unfaithful can have their name "blotted out" of that book (Exod. 32:33; Rev. 3:5).

But He also observes and knows the good that men do. He knew of Noah's faithfulness to Him despite the pervasiveness of sin in the antediluvian world. He "saw" the faithfulness of Abraham demonstrated again and again, and "knew"¹¹ that Abraham feared Him. He saw David's demonstration of courage and great faith in his battle with Goliath, and his steadfast loyalty to Saul and Jonathan. He saw the earnest reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah. He observed the toilsome labors of Elijah and all His faithful prophets, whom He sent and who "rose up early and stayed late" in proclaiming His Word! He saw Daniel climb the stairs to his chambers, open his windows toward Jerusalem, and kneel in prayer, and He heard the prayer itself! He observed the tenacity of Paul, the benevolence of Barnabas, and the eloquence of Apollos.

Every good deed or act of genuine love, every prayer

offered in earnest and faithful compliance with His will, every authorized labor engaged in by those seeking to please Him in all things, and every word of kindness aimed at bringing the lost to Christ or comforting some wounded soul, God sees and does not sleep!

Are you striving to be faithful in all things? Be at peace in your soul; if such is the case, then God sees it! It needs no external advertising. Have you done some good work to aid someone in need? Then be apprised that the Lord of heaven and earth already knows, and has considered it! No sounding of trumpets need be made! Are you faithfully attending and participating in worship to God? If such is the case, then know that He sees and delights in it! God, whose field of vision is unimpaired, sees and knows all. "So be careful, little hands, what you do," and "be careful, little feet, where you go!"

(4) A fourth implication of God's omniscience is that He sees and knows the sufferings and sorrows that one may endure in this life, especially for His sake! There is not a single tear that can fall to the ground from the cheek of one burdened with hardships and trials that goes unseen. He knows the pain, sorrow, and anguish that attend all of us, at one time or another, in this "world of woe," this "vale of tears."

God saw the trials of Noah and his family as they prepared the great Ark and knew of their hardships during its voyage into a "new" world. He observed the hardships of life that attended the sojourn of the patriarchs as they dwelled in tents. He was fully knowledgeable of Joseph's tests in life, even when Joseph was cast into the depths of the prison, because of the lie of one lascivious woman. He knew of Job's patient endurance of the tragedies which he suffered, and rewarded his steadfastness in the end. He heard every word of discouragement, every syllable of murmuring, and every phrase of rebellion uttered against

Moses. He observed David's struggles to survive in the wilderness regions from the plots of Saul.

The Psalmist frequently cried out for the Lord to "remember" his afflictions and the threatenings of his enemies, and the Record assures us that God did just that! He defeated the enemies of David, and delivered him from every snare. God saw the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace and the prophet Daniel in the midst of the den of lions. He was cognizant of Jeremiah's inhospitable stay in the miry pit, Ezekiel's heart-breaking loss of the "desire of his eyes," and the murder of Zechariah the son of Berechiah by his own countrymen.

He saw the temptation of the Only-Begotten by the Devil. God felt the grief of the Son at the tomb of Lazarus, when "Jesus wept." He heard His pleas at Gethsemane, and sent an angel to "strengthen" Him. Despite the fact that He had to abandon the Son to His death on Calvary, God yet demonstrated in the tableau of nature His awareness of the Son's anguish, humiliation, and sufferings. He shrouded the earth in darkness, and shook its very foundations with an earthquake. Material creation itself groaned with the death of the Son of God.

The Lord, even while in the body of His humiliation, knew that the widow of Luke 21 had put in all her substance. He knew her penury. God the Father and God the Son witnessed the stoning of Stephen as the first Christian martyr. God saw the slaying of James, the brother of John. He knew of Peter's imprisonment by Herod, and heard the singing of Paul and Silas in their Philippian jail-cell. He saw all of Paul's sufferings and hardships, catalogued in 2 Corinthians 11, and observed the gallant Apostle as he laid his head upon the chopping block. Every heartache, every pain and anguish, every ounce of human misery God knows, perceives, and understands. He is sympathetic to the human condition,

especially as pertains to His spiritual children.

David writes of Him:

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust” (Psm. 103:13-14; Read Hebrews 11:32-40).

God was fully aware of the sufferings of those who faithfully sought to obey Him. He knows our needs as well today (cf. Matt. 6:24-34). While suffering is a part of living (especially as a Christian, Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12), we can be assured that God knows our plight and hardships, and is willing to help us bear up under them. Peter exhorts, “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7). When no one else may care for your soul, God does (Psa. 142:4-5).

Are you seriously sick or shut-in due to infirmities, or preparing for critical surgery? Do you seem to have been forgotten by family, friends, and even brethren in Christ? Know this: God sees, God knows, and God cares! Do you “bear” in your “body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ,” as Paul did? Then be certain, God knows all about it! You may suffer from your own “thorn in the flesh,” but His “grace is sufficient for thee!”

Are you enduring financial burdens and hardships while striving to be responsible and faithful in your stewardship; does it seem like the money runs out before the month does? Your heavenly Father knows your plight and your needs. Put your trust in Him and remember Matthew 6:33 and 1 Timothy 6:6-8. Are you struggling with some problem or trial, is there an enemy who afflicts you seemingly at every step, and no one else seems to know or care? Take note of this: God does see, God does know, and God does care. He will repay the wicked for the evil he commits against you, and He will reward your

patience in meeting the challenges brought by the evil deeds of others. Every wrong will be righted, and the right will be rewarded! God's assurance for this lies in the fact that He is omniscient. He can be no less, and yet be God.

Conclusion

We have examined briefly the subject of the Omniscience of God. We have set forth the nature and Scriptural proof of the doctrine. We have also considered some very practical implications of the doctrine, which should encourage us to do right and discourage us from doing evil.

May God help us to have a greater appreciation and understanding of His nature and essence. He deserves our worship and our obedience: for "in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Endnotes

1 Stephen Charnock, **The Existence and Attributes of God**, vol. 1, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), pp.408-409.

2 David B. Guralnik, general editor, **Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language**, concise edition, (Woodbury: Illustrated World Encyclopedia, Inc.,1971), p.521,663.

3 Mac Deaver, "The Omniscience of God," **What Do You Know About God?**, (Independence: Williams Publishing, 1986), p.209.

4 Thomas D. Ralston, **Elements of Divinity**, edited by T.O. Summers, (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, n.d.), p.23.

5 **Ibid.**

6 William Newton Clarke, **The Christian Doctrine of God**, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p.343.

7 Ralston, **op. cit.**, p.23.

8 Deaver, "The Ominiscience of God," **op.cit.**, pp.211-213.

9 Clark Pinnock, **"God Limits His Knowledge,"**

Predestination and Free Will, ed. by David & Randall Basinger, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), pp. 141-162. Also cf. Pinnock's book co-authored with several other writers, **The Openness of God**, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1994).

10 Some appeal to the passage in Gen. 6, particularly verses 5-7, as proof that God "limits" His knowledge, in as much as He did not know in advance, according to this position's use of the text, the depth of the evil that would be done by men prior to the Flood. However, the language is accommodative and anthropomorphic. It expresses, in vivid detail, with special emphasis, God's utter disgust with mankind's sinful conduct, which in turn justifies the severe measures taken in the sending of the Flood. For a fuller discussion of this text and other such examples, cf. William Arndt, **Bible Difficulties and Seeming Contradictions**, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), pp. 205-207 & Gleason L. Archer, **Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties**, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), pp. 80-81.

11 The verb "know" is used in Genesis 22:12 in the secondary sense of "to acknowledge or recognize," and thus in a similar vein as in Matthew 7:23, where negation is used with it.

CHAPTER 9

THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

DUB McCLISH

Introduction

THE ONLY APPROPRIATE ATTITUDE with which to approach a study of any facet of the Godhead is unmitigated humility. A finite creature is not capable of fully comprehending the nature of his Infinite Creator. This author freely acknowledges his human limitations in understanding and discussing the limitless nature of the characteristics of Deity, and thus enters into this study, he trusts, with due reverence and humility.

The foreknowledge of God is one of those facets of His attributes that has ever intrigued man in his limited capacities. The Bible undeniably and frequently affirms, argues, and illustrates the fact that God possesses this marvelous trait. (Thus, He obviously wanted mankind to know that absolute foreknowledge is innate to Godhood.) Although the Bible says much about this grand subject, this writer is convinced that it must still remain shrouded in mystery to some degree until we are freed from the strictures of a time-bound existence.

There will ever be, as long as time lasts, those “secret things that belong unto Jehovah our God” (Deut. 29:29a),¹ which, according to God’s wisdom, are either inappropriate or unnecessary (or perhaps both!) for us

to know. However, the Bible is composed of facts, promises, commands, and principles which God has revealed to us, and “the things that are revealed belong unto us...” (v. 29 b). While the foreknowledge of God is an awe-inspiring and deep subject, it is still one about which much is revealed to us in the Bible. We are both privileged and obligated to study this material to do our best to comprehend as fully as possible the teaching of the Bible concerning it.

“Foreknowledge” Defined

The Word Defined

The meaning of the word *foreknowledge* is obvious—it means the possession of information concerning an event prior to its occurrence, knowledge in advance, knowledge of the future. “Foreknowledge” translates the compound Greek word *prognosis*, composed of *pro* (“before”) and *gnosis* (knowledge), thus literally, “before-knowledge.” When Anglicized, this word becomes our word *prognosis*, meaning to forecast or predict. In noun and verb forms combined the term appears seven times in the Greek New Testament. As applied to Deity, God’s foreknowledge (along with knowledge of all past and present events and realities) is one facet of His omniscience, which refers to the all-knowing attribute of Deity. The doctrine of God’s foreknowledge is indispensable to the doctrine of His omniscience. If God’s foreknowledge is not infinite His omniscience is not infinite.

Uninspired Statements of the Concept

Perhaps it will be helpful to provide some of the definitions of the foreknowledge of God that men have offered:

A. H. Strong states:

Since it [i.e., God's foreknowledge, DM] is free from all imperfection, God's knowledge is immediate, as distinguished from the knowledge that comes through sense or imagination; simultaneous, as not acquired by successive observations, or built up by processes of reasoning; distinct, as free from all vagueness or confusion; true, as perfectly corresponding to the reality of things; eternal, as comprehended in one timeless act of the divine mind.²

Henry C. Thiessen comments as follows:

God is infinite in knowledge. He knows himself and all other things perfectly from all eternity, whether they be actual or merely possible, whether they be past, present, or future. He knows things immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively, and truly.... God knows the future. From man's standpoint God's knowledge of the future is foreknowledge, but from God's standpoint it is not, since he knows all things by one simultaneous intuition....³

William G. T. Shedd describes God's foreknowledge as resulting from His instantaneous knowledge of all events:

The vast sequences of human history, and the still vaster sequences of physical history, appear all at once, and without any consciousness of succession, to the Divine observer.... Both extremes [i.e., beginning and end, DM] of that unlimited series which make up the history of the created universe, together with all the

intermediates, are seen at once, by the eternal Creator of the universe.... God knows the things that shall be wrought, and the order of them in their being brought upon the stage of the world; yet both the things and the order, he knows by **one** act [of knowledge].... God sees the end from the beginning, and hence for him there is no interval nor sequence between the end and the beginning.⁴

Stephen Charnock makes a similar observation:

God knows immutably.... Our knowledge, indeed, is always arriving to us or flowing from us; we pass from one degree to another, from worse to better, or from better to worse; but God loses nothing by the ages that are run, nor will He gain anything by the ages that are run, nor will He gain anything by the ages that are to come. If there were a variation in the knowledge of God...He would grow wiser than He was; He was not then perfectly wise before.⁵

Inspired Declarations And Demonstrations Of The Concept

The Scriptures consistently set forth God as filled with all knowledge of all future events. Isaiah was inspired to contrast dumb and lifeless idols with Jehovah in the following words: “I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done (Isa. 46:9–10). The fact that “His understanding is infinite” (Psm. 147:5) must include future events or it is not infinite. Nothing past, present, or future is hidden from God, but “All things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13).

There is ample demonstration of God's foreknowledge in the Scriptures. God knew the succession of empires that would succeed Nebuchadnezzar's over the next five centuries and that in the last of the series His everlasting kingdom would be established (Dan. 2:31–44). Jehovah called Josiah by name and three centuries before the king was born told of the campaign against idolatry he would undertake (1 Kings 13:2). Likewise, God called Cyrus by name and stated about one hundred fifty years beforehand that he would serve God's purpose in rebuilding the temple and allowing the Jews to return to their homeland (Isa. 44:28–45:1).

God knew and revealed numerous details about the Lord's life and death, some of them a millennium before they occurred. In fact, that He would pour out His redeeming blood for sinners was "foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20). Since it was "according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" that "the manifold wisdom of God... might be made known through the church," it must follow that God foreknew the church in eternity (Eph. 3:11). How else could the church have been according to God's "eternal purpose"? Such passages could be multiplied. We may simply summarize by saying that all of the prophetic material in the Bible is at the same time the result and the proof of God's advance knowledge of events future to the time of those to whom the prophecies were revealed and spoken.

Implications Of The Foreknowledge Of God

The omniscience of God, which includes His foreknowledge, is by definition without limit—it means that God literally knows everything about everything that is knowable. If this is not so, then He is not omniscient. That He can declare "...the end from the

beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done” (Isa. 46:10), implies that **He must possess the knowledge** of those things which He declares. The Bible does not teach (as some suggest) that God merely **has the power** to know all things (which, of course, is true), but that **He does in fact know all things!**⁶ Strong says it well: “By this [omniscience, DM] we mean God’s perfect and eternal knowledge of all things which are objects of knowledge, whether they be actual or possible, past, present, or future.”⁷

Knowing the future absolutely includes knowing future events as they relate to men and the men who will cause and be affected by those events. We have already seen this in connection with certain men (Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Josiah, and Jesus). God’s foreknowledge of men and what they will do is just as full for all other persons who have lived and will ever live. This is explicitly stated in Hebrews 4:13: “And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13).

Roy H. Lanier, Sr. well states this implication as he reasons from the case of Cyrus:

If God can know a man by name one hundred fifty years before he is born, and can know what he will do, is it impossible for Him to know a man by name a thousand or ten thousand years before he is born and know what that man will do? Is our God so small, so limited, that He can foresee one hundred fifty years and cannot foresee a person or an event several thousand years in the future?⁸

The same questions are appropriate (and bear the same implications) concerning God’s foreknowledge of

Nebuchadnezzar, Josiah, and the Lord. And what about the foreknowledge Jesus, the Incarnate Word, possessed? The Christ "...needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man" (John 2:25). Hence, He knew "from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who it was that should betray him," namely Judas Iscariot (John 6:64, 70–71; 13:21–27).

Paul wrote of himself as follows: "But when it was the good pleasure of God, **who separated me, even from my mother's womb**, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles; straightway I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:15-16; cf. Acts 9:15; emp. DM). How can this be understood to mean anything other than that God in His infinite foreknowledge both knew Saul/Paul personally (i.e., by name) and knew the issue of his life (both as a persecutor and a preacher of the Gospel) **before the apostle was born?**

In His omniscience, God's knowledge is so complete that He knows when a sparrow falls to the ground, and he even knows the number of hairs on a person's head (Matt. 10:29–30). The doctrine of the foreknowledge of God implies that He knows of the fall of every sparrow **yet to occur**. Are we to understand the Lord to be saying that His (and our) Father knew the number of hairs only on the heads of His contemporaries in the first century? Hardly. Jesus' statement has the force of declaring that God's knowledge is so absolute that He knows the number of hairs on the heads of **every person who ever lived or ever will live**.

When did God come into such specific and detailed knowledge? Did He only come to know of each sparrow's fall at the time of its falling, or did He know of its fall before it occurred? Was Jehovah able to know the hairs of a man's head only after each man was born and then

grew a head of hair? Such hypotheses cannot be harmonized with the Bible's claim of God's unqualified omniscience, including His unqualified foreknowledge. Jesus' statement about the sparrows and the hairs does not merely imply that His Father has the **power** to know, **but that He knows!** Remember, Isaiah is very explicit on this point: "I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done" (Isa. 46:9-10). Although the capability is incomprehensible to us (due to our finite limitations), we must conclude that God's infinite foreknowledge implies that **He has always known** the number of hairs on every person's head **even before He created Adam** and the first head of hair!

While we may not be able to comprehend how God possesses absolute foreknowledge, the Bible plainly tells us how He **does not** acquire it. Again, Isaiah is helpful: "Who hath directed the Spirit of Jehovah, or being his counselor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?" (Isa. 40:13-14).

God does not acquire any of His knowledge by learning from any man or men. Just so, neither does His knowledge come through a process of learning from experience, observation, reasoned conclusions, or any other source exterior to Himself. The definitions of God's omniscience and foreknowledge quoted earlier, though uninspired, correctly emphasize the simultaneous, instantaneous, and immediate nature of God's knowledge. To speak of the "foreknowledge of God" is actually an accommodation to our finite limitations. Remember Theissen's astute observation quoted above that what appears to us to be God's foreknowledge is not really such at all to Him Who knows all things

(whether past, present, or future) **simultaneously**.

To state it in other words, if God **learns** the number of each person's hairs only as that person is born and grows a head of hair (as remarkable as this would be), then He is not omniscient—His foreknowledge is faulty. If He must learn the number of hairs on one's head only when one comes to have his hair, then there is at least one thing that God did not know **before He learned it**. If God knows more now than He did at some previous point, and if He will yet learn more (e.g., when another person is born and grows a head of hair), then **His knowledge is incomplete**. The Bible's claims for God's omniscience, foreknowledge, yea for His immutability, are all thereby falsified. Furthermore, if God is not infinite in knowledge (which includes foreknowledge), then He is not infinite at all.

But let us notice another implication of God's ultra-foreknowledge. Since God knows **in advance** such insignificant minutia about each one of His rational creatures (as the number of their hairs), it surely follows that He also knows **in advance** the more significant details about each of us, including whether or not we will be saved or lost. So we affirm the doctrine of God's foreknowledge **logically demands**, and so the **Scriptures teach**.

Ephesians 1:4 is relevant to our subject. In his letter to the Ephesian church Paul states that God "...chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love." Calvinists cite this verse as proof that God arbitrarily and unconditionally chose in eternity the very individuals who would be saved and that this number can neither be augmented nor diminished. However, neither this nor any other passage teaches such a dark, dismal, and damnable doctrine. Rather, the demands of

the passage are quite well satisfied by understanding Paul to be declaring that God determined before time began⁹ (a reference to his foreknowledge) that those whom He would save would be those alone who would enter into Christ and live holy and unblemished lives. Those who are in Christ constitute the church (1:1), “which is His body” (1:22–23), and which He expects to be “holy and without blemish” (5:27; cf. 1:4). While this writer utterly rejects the Calvinistic spin on this passage, we do no violence to it to suggest that in God’s foreknowledge He knew “before the foundation of the world” the specific individuals who would be added to the church so as to constitute the elect.

Paul also wrote to the Roman saints of the foreknowledge of God:

For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:29-30).

This passage declares that God possessed foreknowledge of those whom He (1) foreordained to follow His Son, (2) called (by the Gospel [2 Thess. 2:13–14]), (3) justified, and (4) glorified (i.e., the eventual reward of those who are justified). Lanier’s comments are worthwhile on this passage:

Paul speaks of the church in the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 3:10–11); and it was in this eternal purpose that He foreknew, foreordained, called, justified, and glorified the people that make up His church (Rom. 8:29–30). Since none are yet glorified (Rom. 8:17), we are forced to accept this as a statement of purpose and not as things

accomplished.¹⁰

While “whom he foreknew” would certainly include the church in the aggregate, this phrase may more specifically refer to God’s foreknowledge of individuals who meet Paul’s description.

John writes of those whose names have “...not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 17:8; cf. 13:8). If some names have **not** been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, then by implication some names **have been** written from that time. To not write or to write the names of people requires knowledge of their identity—“The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Tim. 2:19). Some might quibble over the preposition “from” as opposed to “before” (as in John 17:24; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:20; et al.). Others suggest that “world” refers to a dispensation of time (e.g., the Mosaical Age, see endnote 9) rather than to the material universe. In either case John still depicts God as foreknowing the names of those who will be saved and lost, whether by a few years or a few thousand years. As previously pointed out, if God learns those who are His only as they become His, then He learns something new every day and His knowledge is incomplete. Were this so He would not be omniscient, as the Bible consistently declares Him to be.

Some Misconceptions Considered

In an effort to avoid and refute one erroneous extreme Bible students sometimes adopt an opposing extreme. This phenomenon may explain some of the positions that men have come to occupy and some of the arguments they make concerning the foreknowledge of God. Objections to the conclusions set forth above fall into both Calvinistic and non-Calvinistic categories.

The Calvinistic Misconception of God's Foreknowledge

While Calvinists correctly advocate the absolute and unlimited foreknowledge of God, they incorrectly conceive of this fact as eliminating the exercise of man's free will. However, the Bible sets forth the free will of man with as much clarity and frequency as it does the foreknowledge of God. If man does not have the freedom to choose whether or not to believe and obey the Gospel and be saved, then the great commission is ludicrous and its execution is a waste of time, effort, and money. If man has no power to choose then every invitation to come to and abide in Christ (Matt. 11:28–30; 2 Cor. 5:20b; Rev. 22:17; et al.) and every warning not to reject Him (Mark 16:16; John 12:48; Acts 8:20–23; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; et al.) is useless.

God's foreknowledge and man's free will must (and can) be harmonized because they are both Bible doctrines and the Word of God does not contradict itself. Calvinists falsely conclude that foreknowledge demands predestination and predetermination. Man therefore is helpless to make any choice concerning his eternal destiny—this has already been predetermined for every person. Calvinists (and some non-Calvinists as well) would do well to heed Lanier's warning: "But we must be careful to maintain a distinction between God's foreknowledge of men and events, and the predetermining of men and events."¹¹ A statement from Thiessen is right to the point: "The knowledge of the future is not itself causative. Free actions do not take place because they are foreseen, but they are foreseen because they will take place."¹² A traffic reporter in a helicopter may foresee two automobiles that will crash because they are on a collision course, but his foreknowledge does not cause the accident.

The Non-Calvinistic Misconception of God's Foreknowledge

Ironically, many non-Calvinists (in fact, some who are strong anti-Calvinists) fail to harmonize God's unlimited foreknowledge with man's free will. They actually think as Calvinists concerning the implications of absolute foreknowledge, concluding that such implies rigid causation and predetermination of that which is foreknown. The Calvinist approaches this assumed clash of principles by denying man his free will, taught in the Bible from beginning to end. On the other hand, some non-Calvinists approach this perceived contradiction by denying God His unlimited foreknowledge, likewise taught in the Bible from cover to cover! They assume that only thereby may man retain the ability to exercise his free will as set forth in Scripture. The following arguments are made in defense of a limited foreknowledge of God:

1. The late and lamented Guy N. Woods asks, "If God had already devised a plan for the redemption of man from a sin which was certain to be committed, how could Adam and Eve avoid its commission?"¹³ (This question is asked in light of Peter's statement that the sacrifice of Christ was "...foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world" [1 Pet. 1:20]). While extremely hesitant to differ with such a faithful and erudite scholar, we must do so in this case. A corollary to this question is, "How could God foreknow the sin of Adam without predetermining that he would commit it?" It is assumed that He could not have and that God therefore **did not know** whether Adam would or would not sin. However, if the Psalmist was correct, God is infinite in His knowledge (Psm. 147:5). Did He have this infinite knowledge merely from the time after Adam sinned and up to the time the Psalm was written? Or does it include

eternity—with no point of beginning—thus before the world and Adam were created? If God’s knowledge was infinite before creation then He foreknew the fact that Adam would sin. If God did not foreknow that Adam would sin then His knowledge is not infinite as the Bible teaches.

As earlier noticed, if God has to “learn” things after the fact by experience or observation then, while His knowledge is still far superior to ours, the Bible deceives us when it declares: “And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). The fact that the Lord foreknew that Judas would betray Him (John 6:64, 70–71) did not force him to engage in his treachery. If this were so then God would be unjust for punishing him for his crime. According to Acts 2:23 God foreknew at some time that the Jews would crucify the Christ, but this neither forced them to do so nor did it release them from their responsibility for so doing (v. 36; 7:52). The flaw in this misconception is that of equating foreknowledge with Calvinistic predestination. Lanier says it well: “God’s foreknowledge of a man’s choice of a course in life has nothing to do with the man’s freedom to choose his own course.”¹⁴ Rex A. Turner, Sr. agrees:

In short, when God created man, he not only knew the possibility and probability of man’s fall; but also, he knew the certainty of it.... The case is that God made a plan of redemption for man before he made man [Turner then quotes Rom. 8:29–30 and Eph. 1:4 as proof of this statement]. Thus the vicarious death of God’s son was in God’s plan for man, and that before he made man.¹⁵

2. T. W. Brents argues that, while no man has the

right to limit any of the attributes of God, He can limit Himself. Thus, he avers, although God had the **power** to foreknow all things, He has limited His own knowledge. “He saw fit to **avoid** a knowledge of every thing **incompatible with the freedom of the human will** and the system of government devised by Him for man [emp. in orig.]”¹⁶ This writer is interested in knowing just what God chooses or chose not to know. Brents apparently thought he knew, but we wonder how or where he got his information. Furthermore, if God has the power to foreknow all things, but chooses to exclude certain things from His knowledge, how could He exclude such things without knowing what He had chosen to exclude?

3. Brents argues God’s limited foreknowledge on similar statements by God in two passages.¹⁷ The first concerns the evils of Sodom: “I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, **I will know**” (Gen. 18:20-21, emp. DM). The second relates to Abraham’s offering of Isaac, which was prevented by a message from Jehovah’s angel: “And he said, Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him. For **now I know** that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me” (22:12, emp. DM). The argument is made that God apparently had no foreknowledge or present knowledge of either the moral condition of Sodom before His investigative trip or of the extent of Abraham’s faith before He saw Abraham raise the knife over Isaac.

But Lanier correctly points out that Jehovah used figurative, accommodative language in these passages.¹⁸ When God is depicted as having feet, hands, eyes, and ears He is simply using language with which men can identify, although God has no fleshly body with fleshly members as do men. Likewise, when God is said to “go” or

to “be” somewhere the language is obviously figurative and accommodative, for God is actually omnipresent (which, incidentally, is a key to His omniscience)—He does not “go” anywhere, but is always everywhere all the time.¹⁹ Whitelaw says on Genesis 18:21, “The entire verse is anthropomorphic, and designed to express the Divine solicitude that the strictest justice should characterize all his dealings both with men and nations,” and makes a similar comment on Genesis 22:12.²⁰ The fact that God said concerning Sodom, “I will go down,” as a man might say, **but He did not literally do so**, also signals that God is speaking figuratively. He actually sent His angels to Sodom. When He said, “I will know,” and “Now I know” He was again accommodating Himself to the way men think, speak, and act. If someone asks this writer if baptism is necessary for salvation, he might say, “Turn with me to Mark 16:16 and we will know the answer,” although he has read the passage hundreds of times and long ago committed it to memory. Such a statement is to speak as if the answer were not known as an accommodation to his querist. C. W. Hodge observes:

It is true that the Scripture makes use of anthropomorphic forms of expression as regards the way in which God obtains knowledge (Gen. 3:8), and sometimes even represents Him as if He did not know certain things (Gen. 11:5; 18:21); nevertheless the constant representation of the Scripture is that God knows everything. This perfect knowledge of God, moreover, is not merely a knowledge which is practically unlimited for all religious purposes [i.e., which excludes certain God-selected areas of knowledge, DM], but is omniscience in the strictest sense of the term.²¹

It is a misuse of these passages to array them against the perfect foreknowledge of God.

4. Another incident in Scripture that is employed to mitigate the foreknowledge of God involves the golden calf built by Aaron at Sinai and, because of it, God's intent to destroy the people and create a new nation from Moses (Exod. 32:7–14).²² In this setting Moses interceded for the people, pleading with God not to destroy Israel and reminding Him of His promises to Abraham and Isaac. God's response was, "And Jehovah repented of the evil which he said he would do unto his people" (v. 14).

The argument is that if God has absolute foreknowledge He knew He was not going to destroy Israel before He said He would; therefore He was deceptive in expressing His anger, in stating His intent to annihilate the people, and in pretending to change His mind. Once more this line of argument fails to take into account the nature of Biblical anthropomorphism and figurative speech. Matthew Henry puts this entire incident into perspective:

But God would thus express the greatness of his just displeasure against them, **after the manner of men**, who would have none to intercede for those they resolve to be severe with. Thus also he would put an honor upon prayer, intimating that nothing but the intercession of Moses could save them from ruin, that he might be a type of Christ...[emp. DM].²³

We do not presume to understand or explain all of the circumstances and statements involved in this episode, including why God acted and spoke as He did, but we are determined not to interpret these or any other statements or events in the Sacred Record so as to impinge the

explicitly-taught foreknowledge of God in the slightest degree.

The passages discussed above are representative of a few others, similar in their statement, that have also been put to the same use. However, we believe the solution to their apparent indications of some limitations in the foreknowledge of God is found in the comments on the passages already discussed.

Conclusion

While acknowledging an incomplete understanding of this magnificent subject, we forthrightly affirm our belief in the unlimited, infinite, absolute foreknowledge of God because we believe the Scriptures so teach. We fail to see any contradiction between this view of God's foreknowledge and the full exercise of man's free will in choosing to obey or disobey God. We are unable to see how foreknowledge implies Calvinistic foreordination or predestination. At the same, we are aware that many able scholars, past and present, believe otherwise.

The summary of God's ultimate omniscience, including His foreknowledge, was written by the inspired David:

O Jehovah, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, And art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, But, lo, O Jehovah, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, And laid thy hand upon me (Psm. 139:1–5).

Paul marveled over God's omniscience:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? (Rom. 11:33-34).

With David, we must humbly confess: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psm. 139:6). If the full understanding of God’s omniscience and foreknowledge is beyond the kin of inspired men, then it is surely beyond that of this writer. While we cannot understand how such power, intuition, and capability operate due to our physical and finite limitations, we can understand that the Bible in fact teaches that our God possesses these awesome attributes.

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

2 A. H. Strong, **Systematic Theology** (Philadelphia, PA: The Judson Press, 1907, reprint 1946), p. 52.

3 Henry C. Thiessen, **Lectures in Systematic Theology** (Grand Rapids, MI: William b. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1949, reprint 1992), p. 81.

4 William G. T. Shedd, **Dogmatic Theology** (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980 reprint), 1:345.

5 Stephen Charnock, **The Existence and Attributes of God** (Ann Arbor, MI: Cushing-Malloy, Inc., 1969), p. 541.

6 This author at one time maintained that it was compatible with the Bible doctrine of omniscience to hold that, while God **could** know all things, that He has chosen to limit His knowledge so as **not to know** some things (e.g., that Adam would sin). Upon further study he has concluded that such a view cannot be harmonized with God’s omniscience, and that said view is contradictory to Scripture, to sound reasoning, and

to the necessity of the case.

7 Strong, p. 282.

8 Roy H. Lanier, Sr., **Twenty Years of the Problem Page** (Abilene, TX: Quality Pub., 1984), 1:194.

9 Calvinists conclude that the doctrine of God's unlimited foreknowledge implies the denial of man's free will. Others, not Calvinists, accept the existence of the same alleged doctrinal conflict, but attempt to resolve it by denying the doctrine of God's unlimited foreknowledge (e.g., T. W. Brents, **Gospel Plan of Salvation** [Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1957], pp. 93–105). In quest of this same resolution, the late and much-respected Guy N. Woods (**A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude** [Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1954], pp. 47–48) argued that "world" in the clause "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:20; et al.) should be understood as "dispensation," thus "before the beginning of the Mosaic Age." We must respectfully disagree. If "before the foundation of the Mosaic Age" is correct exegesis in one passage, then it should make sense in other contexts as well. In Jesus' lengthy prayer in the upper room He prayed for a restoration of the glory that was His "before the world was." Then He spoke of the love with which the Father loved Him "before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). Surely none would seriously argue that the Lord is referring only to sometime before Pentecost in these statements. Rather, His statements are clear references to the glory He had and to the Father's love of Him in His pre-incarnate existence, before creation itself.

10 Lanier, **Twenty Years...**, 1:200.

11 Roy H. Lanier, Sr., **The Timeless Trinity for the Ceaseless Centuries** (Denver, CO: Roy H. Lanier, Sr., 1974), p. 144.

12 Thiessen, pp. 81–82.

13 Woods, p. 47.

14 Lanier, **The Timeless Trinity...**, p. 145.

15 Rex A. Turner, Sr., **Systematic Theology** (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Christian School of Religion, 1989), pp. 54–55.

16 Brents, pp. 96–97.

17 Brents, pp. 97–100.

18 Lanier, **Twenty Years...**, pp. 197–198.

19 The technical term for the attribution of human traits to God is “anthropomorphism,” from the Greek word for “mankind,” *anthropos*.

20 Thomas Whitelaw, **The Pulpit Commentary**, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950), 1:246, 284.

21 Caspar Wistar Hodge, **The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1939), 2:1128.

22 Brents, pp. 103–104.

23 Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible** (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., N.d.), 1:410.

CHAPTER 10

THE TITLES OF CHRIST

GLENN COLLEY

IS THERE ANYTHING IN A NAME? The Holy Spirit through Solomon wrote, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches” (Prov. 22:1). Shakespeare, in *Romeo and Juliet* tried to argue for a moment that a name was somewhat irrelevant as he wrote, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by another name would smell as sweet.” Yet Shakespeare wisely observed in *Othello*,

Good name in man and woman, dear my Lord,
is the immediate jewel of their souls; Who steals
my purse steals trash; ‘tis something, nothing;
‘Twas mine, ‘tis his, and has been slave to
thousands. But he that filches from me my good
name robs me of that which not enriches him,
and makes me poor indeed.

There are times in the Bible when names have great meaning. When the neighbors and cousins came on the eighth day to circumcise John and name him Zechariah after his father, John’s mother objected. She said to call him John. They said, “There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.” Zechariah wrote, “His name is John.” He had heaven’s directions about that boy’s name.

When Naomi returned to her people after losing her husband and sons, she moaned to her friends, “Call me

Mara..."(Ruth 1:20). She wanted people to know that she was bitter and that the Lord had evidently abandoned her. Surely later she grew to regret such a sour spirit.

In Matthew 1:21 we read that the angel said to Joseph, the husband of Mary, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus." As we sometimes sing, "Sweetest note in sareph song; sweetest name on mortal tongue; sweetest treasure ever known, Jesus, precious Jesus." Or in another familiar song, "There is a name I love to hear, I love to sing its worth; It sounds like music in mine ear, the sweetest name on earth. Oh, how I love Jesus..."

Jesus is called many things in the Bible; some are names, others are simply descriptions. There are at least 56 names by which Jesus is called or described in the Word of God. This chapter will consider a few of those names.

"Everlasting Father"

Isaiah refers to Jesus as the "Everlasting Father."

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful,
Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting
Father, The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

"The Mighty God"

Notice that He is also called here, "The mighty God." Some refuse to accept the fact that God became man. They have tried to re-translate this verse to read, "Mighty hero," and say it is only symbolical. Yet the Bible shows again and again that Jesus is more than mere man or prophet. He is God. Consider these verses:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word
was with God, and the Word was God (John

1:1)...And Thomas answered and said unto him,
My Lord and my God (John 20:28).

And without controversy great is the mystery of
godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,
justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached
unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world,
received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:16).

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God,
is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness
is the sceptre of thy kingdom (Heb. 1:8).

The greatest compliment to mankind is that the Lord
Jesus, God, was made flesh and became, in many ways,
just like us:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers
of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took
part of the same; that through death he might
destroy him that had the power of death, that
is, the devil (Heb. 2:14).

We are pleased to be part of a race, the human race,
which could produce great poets and historians and
scientists. But that does not compare to the joy we feel
when considering that God thought enough of our meager
race to be one of us for a while.

How wonderful to observe the word “Everlasting” in
this name for Jesus. We can never even entertain the
idea that Jesus could one day die and cease to exist. The
pain of losing a loved one here, though great, could not
compare with that kind of fear and dread.

“Bright And Morning Star”

Jesus is called the “Bright and Morning Star.”

I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16).

This star is the one which, at some seasons, precedes the rising of the sun and leads on the day. Jesus Christ is the harbinger of the day. He sustains a relationship to a dark world similar to this beautiful star. He leads us to the light of day. Just what is the idea Jesus was conveying with this name?

Perhaps He hoped that when we see the star we would think of Him. The first thing that arrests the eye in the morning is that bright and morning star. Such a sight will immediately take the mind of Christians to the Man from Galilee.

Perhaps the name serves to remind us that the Savior should be the first object that should draw our eye and heart on the coming of each new morning.

In each trial, each scene of sorrow, let us think of that bright star of the morning as it rises on the darkness of the night. May we all meditate on this brilliant emblem of the Savior rising over the gloom and sorrow of this life.

A similar name or description of our Lord is in Luke 1:78: "Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the **dayspring** from on high hath visited us." Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was filled with the Holy Ghost when he prophesied these words. The "Dayspring" means the morning light, the warm, beautiful Aurora which comes with the rising of the sun. How such a description triggers the emotions of the sincere follower of Christ! He is called the Dayspring from on high because the light of the Gospel shines from heaven.

Verse seventy-nine of that same chapter says He came "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the

shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Travelers, being overtaken by night, would wait patiently for the morning light. Here is man, wandering in the darkness of sin, sitting in the shadow of death. Then comes the dawn of hope. 2 Peter 1:19 says:

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts....

“Horn Of Salvation”

Jesus is called the “Horn of Salvation.” “And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” (Luke 1:69). A horn is a symbol of strength. The figure is taken from the fact that in horned animals the strength lies in the horn. Think, for example, of a rhinoceros, elk, goat or a bull. Jesus Christ is the horn, or strength, of our salvation.

“Christ”

Jesus is called “Christ.” Matthew 1:16 says, “And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” The major names for the Savior, (i.e. Lord, Jesus, and Christ), form a wonderful triad. In the Bible they are moved around in most interesting ways. Sometimes they are taken separately and the Savior is exalted as Lord, or as Jesus, or as Christ. There are also combinations such as, “Lord Jesus,” “Jesus Christ,” “Christ Jesus,” “Christ Jesus our Lord,” “Christ the Lord,” and “the very Christ.” One Bible student observed that we have His authority in Lord, His manhood in Jesus, and His glory in Christ. Acts 2:36 reads, “God hath made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ.” (The

word “made” here means “appointed.”). Jesus is His given name, but Christ is a designation of His position.

Nothing really compares with Jesus being the anointed, the “Christ.” Christ (Greek) and Messiah (Hebrew) both mean the same thing: Anointed. John 1:41 says:

He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

Note that this name is usually preceded with the article prefixed, “**the** Christ.”

But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ (Acts 9:22), (or simply, “this is **the** Christ”).

“Son Of God”

Jesus is called the “Son of God.” Mark 1:1 says, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” John the Baptist declared, “And I saw and bare record, that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34). This designation of our Lord is found about fifty times in Scripture. Consider that Jesus is often referred to as “the Son.” He is called “a son,” (Heb. 3:6), and “The Son,” (Heb. 1:8). In human terms, a son is a male born of a woman. Jesus was born of Mary, but as the “Son of God” the thought is different. This pertains to the relationship of the Son to the Father, and not to His human generation.

There are three clearly distinct personalities who possess all the characteristics of God. In Matthew three, when Jesus is baptized, the Christ is in the water, the Holy Spirit descends as a dove, and the Father speaks from heaven. In John 17, Jesus the Son prays to God the

Father. In John 14, Jesus promises to send the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit. The Father is God, the Son is God (John 1:1), and the Holy Spirit is also God, (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4). And yet, they have different roles in creation, redemption, etc.

“Only Begotten Son”

Jesus is called the “Only begotten Son.” “Only begotten” is never applied by John to any but Jesus, and it is applied five times to Jesus: 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, 1 John 4:9. We are the sons of God through adoption, (Romans 8:15-16), but Jesus is the only **begotten** Son.

“Son Of The Highest”

Jesus is called the “Son of the Highest.” Luke 1:32 says, “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.” The “Highest” is clearly God: “The Highest gave His voice” (Psm. 18:13); “Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands...” (Acts 7:48). When Jesus was given His birth-name by Gabriel, it was said, “he shall be called the Son of the Highest.” Interestingly, it was on this basis that Jesus was put to death. Caiaphas, the high priest, said, “Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” Jesus said, “I am....” (Mark 14:61). Because the Jews believed Jesus was not the Messiah, they took this high and holy description as blasphemy when attached to Jesus.

“I AM”

Jesus is called “I AM.” Exodus 3:14 says, “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” The manner in which Jesus used the phrase strikingly suggests His similarity to the Father. Jesus

was responding to the Jews contention that He could not have existed before Abraham's time, because he wasn't yet fifty years old. In reality, as a man he wasn't before Abraham; yet as God He clearly was! Jesus was and is eternal, and that is the point of this title. His name has always been "I AM." His name will always be "I AM." Eternal and forever.

Those Jews who recognized what Jesus was implying began to stone Him. They believed Him to be a mere man who claimed to be God's Son, so they misapplied passages such as Leviticus 24:16:

And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death.

"Lamb Of God"

Jesus is called the "Lamb of God." In John 1:29 we read:

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

This is among the list of titles which have a direct bearing on the quality of the blood He was to shed on the cross:

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was*

upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. (Isa. 53:4-7).

This declaration from John can be regarded as the first clear presentation of the doctrine of the cross in New Testament times. F. B. Meyer said, "The Gospel glistens in it as the whole sun in a single dewdrop." All the blood of sacrificed beasts was not able to give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain sin always left behind (Heb. 10:4).

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing (Rev. 5:11-12).

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood... (Rev. 1:5).

The blood of the Lamb of God has unceasing efficacy to wash away our sins, to make us acceptable to God, and to secure us for eternal life (Rom. 8:1-2). How much is blood worth? At the Red Cross, it's worth a coke, a cookie, and the deep gratitude of those who really need blood to get better. At a blood bank it is worth a few dollars. In a war zone, the blood of one man may be viewed as worth little. Yet the blood of the Lamb of God is pure enough to forgive the sin of every man and woman who ever lived. No wonder Acts 4:12 declares that with no other name than Jesus can we be saved!

With such observations, we must marvel at the joy we share as we realize that we wear His name when we obey His gospel and begin our lives as "Christians." May we ever walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called (Eph. 4:1).

CHAPTER 11

THE GREAT I AM

GARY COLLEY

WHAT A JOY TO AGAIN be associated with the elders, this great congregation, and brother B. J. Clarke, the director of this POWER lectureship. This year's theme and speakers are truly a combination that will be helpful to edifying in our entire brotherhood. All other subjects of importance, both celestial and terrestrial, are secondary to the importance of our study of "**the giver of all good perfect gifts**" (Jas. 1:17).

Who Is "The Great I AM"?

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exod. 3:13-14).

The reference in Exodus 3:14 to "I AM" originates from the Hebrew word *Ehyeh*, which comes from the same root as "Jehovah." Jehovah is the ever living God of all Heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1), identified and declared to be such throughout the Bible. A comment found in Robert Young's Analytical Concordance To The Bible (page 506)

says, “This is a name indicating the unsearchableness of God rather than His mere existence, as commonly supposed.”

The Great Man Moses

Moses had received his faith in God at the knee of his mother and father. This ennobling instilled faith by his parents was strong enough to cause him to continue in faith in God the rest of his life (Heb. 3:23-26; Prov. 22:6). Like Timothy, who had been given his godly training from the Word of God by his mother and grandmother to bring him up correctly, so Moses, like Timothy, also had an unfeigned faith in God (2 Tim. 1:5). His reverence for God, and his upright character because of God’s instruction, caused him to choose correctly and cast his lot in life, what ever the cost, with the people of God.

After being “found” as a babe by Pharaoh’s daughter, his sister Miriam obtained permission to bring a “nurse of the Hebrews” to raise the child. She of course had been placed there for the very purpose of bringing the parents of Moses into the raising of Moses. They received wages for raising their own child? And, so do all parents receive “pay” today, either in joy or sorrow?

He received his name, “Moses,” because he was drawn out of the water (Exod. 2:10). After an acceptable period of time in the care of his parents, Moses was delivered to and taught in Pharaoh’s house in all of the ways of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22). He was raised with what some might call today “a silver spoon” in his mouth. However, when Moses was about forty years of age, because of his faith in God, well-learned from his parents, he pushed from his head and possession the wealth, honor, and luxury of a corrupt court, as well as the crown of rulership of the Egyptian kingdom. This he did in order to take his place with the oppressed, downtrodden and

persecuted people of God.

Such a magnanimous man was Moses! No Hebrew prophet or ruler equaled him in character, official dignity, or in the knowledge of God's will, nor his unusual opportunities of announcing the great "I AM" to the world! In the Honor roll of the faithful, in Hebrews 11, it is noted that "he had respect unto the recompense of reward" that he looked forward to, and which will be given in Heaven.

Moses Fleeing To Midian

Following about forty years of his life, Moses found it necessary to flee from Egypt. This came as a result of him defending an Israelite from being killed by an Egyptian, whom the language indicates was intent on killing the Israelite. Moses knew the original law of God that "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed"(Gen. 9:6). Most agree that Moses was rightly justified in slaying the Egyptian murderer. The next day while attempting to bring peace between two of his fighting brethren, he learned that the fact which he thought was hidden, was widely known. He fled for fear of Pharaoh, whom he believed was seeking to kill him. Moses fled to the land of Midian.

Happenings In Midian

Moses fled to the land of Midian, about three hundred miles southeast of the land of Goshen, where he would live for about forty years (Acts 7:30). At the age of eighty, after his many years of preparation, there came the call of God for him to do the greatest work of his life! What a wonderful lesson in preparation (Rom. 1:14-16; 1 Pet. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:15). To his surprise it seems, he was chosen by God to lead the oppressed people of Israel out of the land of Egypt! He had obtained his wife, the daughter of a priest, while in Midian, to which union was born one son

(Exod. 2:16-22).

While in the field caring for his father-in-law's flock at the back part of the wilderness, close to a place called "Horeb" (Exod. 3:1), also called "Sinai," which some think were two peaks, Moses saw a most unusual sight! It was not strange to see a bush on fire in the wilderness, but it was especially appealing to him, because this burning bush kept burning and was not consumed! He went closer to see this unusual sight, and was startled to hear a voice speaking out of the flame! The record says, "The angel of Jehovah appeared unto him in a flame of fire." (Exod. 3:2)

As he sees this awe inspiring circumstance of a visible display of the majesty of God, similar to that which would happen later in the same mountain when Moses received the Ten Commandments, Moses really gives his undivided attention. Moses knew that this visible display, and the voice that spoke to him out of the bush, had to be and was of divine and not human power. Being told to draw nigh to the bush after he removed his shoes, (an act of reverence) he was told, because of God's presence, that "the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5).

Moses must have been convinced beyond any shadow of a doubt by these happenings, and likewise given great assurance by the calling of his name, that this occurrence could only be happening by the power of none other than God. It would alter his closest thoughts and attention to the command about to be given to him by God. He would need all of the assurance possible for him to obey the instruction about to be given him by God, and to get him to return to face the Egyptian king! God further assured him by identifying Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God Says, "Deliver My Burdened People"

Following these happenings, Moses is told that God fully understood the afflictions and sufferings of the people

of Israel in Egyptian bondage, and that they must be delivered from their burdens. The “voice” then instructed him that he was chosen to be the leader to bring God’s people out of bondage and to lead them into the land of promise, “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 3:8). When the commission to Moses is finally made clear, he begins to plead his inability to do such a task. After all, he had tried to free the people before in killing the Egyptian only to find out that Israel rejected him (Acts 7:25), and he had to flee!

He was even less confident after his forty years in Midian, and due to the fact that no deliverance from bondage had come to Israel in these forty years, he felt he was not up to the task. He was no longer young. Moses in humility asked, “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” Surely in his own power alone, he could not have accomplished the task!

Blessed Assurance

God knows that Moses could not of his own power taken care of this work, hence He promises, “I will be with thee.” In addition to all that has happened at the burning bush, God assures Moses further with the words, “ye shall serve God upon this mountain” (Exod. 3:12). Surely, Moses is encouraged with the definite place of worship given, as well as with the privilege of peaceful worship to God itself. What blessed assurance is given when a “thus saith the Lord” is spoken to assure us of the presence of divine power!

But whether because of the fear that struck Moses when he thought of the influence exercised in Egypt by the enemies of God, in thinking of the gods they worshipped, the magicians and enchanters he would have to face, along with his former experiences in Egypt, Moses

makes objections. He, in his own strength, considered his success in this work utterly unattainable and even unreasonable!

The Answer Of God

In answer to Moses second objection, that the Israelites would not believe him, and that they would ask “Who sent you?” God’s answer was “I AM THAT I AM.” God said that Moses should tell the people that “I Am hath sent me unto you.” Though we may not know all that is involved in God’s expression, it does seem clear that God wanted Moses to know and explain to the people that He was one, self-existent, and eternal God. This was especially important because it made a broad distinction between the true and living God and all of the petty gods worshipped in Egypt! F. B. Meyer, in his comments on Exodus, perhaps comes as close to a sufficient explanation as could be given:

There we have the unity of God to the exclusion of the many gods of Egypt; the unchangeableness of God, who lives in an eternal present; the self-sufficiency of God, who alone is his own equivalent.

The answer of God was very reassuring to Moses as well as the people who were to question him. The God who sent Moses was superior to any and all gods worshipped in Egypt which could not in truth benefit them, nor could they speak, protect, guide, be a friend, guard, nor bless as the God of Heaven. They are referred to in the Bible as dumb idols. They were assured that the God of eternity would be with them wherever Moses might lead them! “I AM THAT I AM!” Though other objections by Moses are answered by God (Exod. 4:10-12), these given

are sufficient for our present study.

Jesus Of The Godhead

Let us be reminded that Jesus describes Himself in the book of Revelation, and identifies His membership in the Godhead, by saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty” (Rev. 1:8, 17-18). The “Alpha and the Omega” refer to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and by thus applying them to Himself, Christ shows that He, as the “Logos” or Word made flesh, is the cause and end of all things (cf. Isa. 44:6; John 1:1-4; Col. 1:16). His eternal existence guarantees His promises are true and steadfast, no matter how long may be the fulfillment! Again it is said later:

And the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come (Rev. 4:8).

These creatures being “full of eyes” and sleepless in their unceasing praise and worship of God, say “Holy, holy, holy” which repeated three times, portrays the perfect sacredness of God, His power, and sinless nature. They see all things desired of God in His everlasting and unending existence, while their “six wings” are expressive of swiftness in executing the purposes of God.

Coming Before God

Reverence and respect for the Lord God of Glory should always be on our tongues, as we cry “Holy, holy, holy.” When we enter into His majestic august presence,

how thankful and reverent we should be! It should never become a light or flippant thing to enter into the presence of the all-powerful, eternal Creator. He is the One to whom Paul referred in his unmatched sermon on Mars Hill or Areopagus:

The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, Neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything Seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things (Acts 17:24-25).

Hence, Paul identifies the great "I AM" as not only always alive, but also as the source of life.

The Place Of God's Meeting

It is said by Paul, that God dwelleth not in temples made with hands. But we do know also that Jehovah promised, "in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee and will bless thee" (Exod. 20:24). With a little study we can learn that Jehovah, the great "I AM" placed His name in the Tabernacle, in the Temple of Solomon, and finally in the Christian dispensation, in the church of Christ.

After the Tabernacle was completed in the wilderness of wandering, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle" (Exod. 40:34). At the anointing of Jehu, Elisha is told to remember the presence of God in the Temple:

Then take the vial of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith Jehovah, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not (2 Kings 9:4).

And then in the New Testament, God's name, presence, and blessings are all to be found in the church of Christ. Paul writes:

So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself, being the chief corner stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

Abraham Sees The Incarnation

Jesus said in answer to the Jews in the New Testament:

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad. The Jews therefore said unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was born, I am (John 8:58).

This prophetic utterance, showing Abraham seeing the coming of the Christ into the world as Lord and Saviour, is to be understood in anticipation, not reality. The writer of Hebrews states of Abraham and his family:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. And if indeed they had been mindful of that

country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God for he hath prepared for them a city (Heb. 11:13-16).

Conclusion

These Old Testament worthies died in full faith, or trust in the things promised by God. They died according to faith, that is, in the exercise of faith. They died as they had lived, in faith, as they looked forward to the fulfillment with earnest desire and confident expectation.

Having placed such confidence in God, and having desired so earnestly the pure and elevated joys offered by God, they walked in obedience to all God commanded. And because of their faith, God has prepared and promised for them a permanent abode and unending blessing in Heaven!

Because He is the great "I AM," not only could they have perfect trust and hope in God, but so can each one who lives today. Believing all that God says, obeying all that God says, we can trust Him for all the promises in Christ! (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20; Eph. 1:3). What a blessed hope the Christian has, because of the "I AM THAT I AM!" His promises will not fail us! Let us all submit to His will, and rejoice in "the full assurance of faith." Paul writes this exhortation and warning to all who have placed their hope in Heaven:

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another

to provoke unto love and good works; Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day approaching (Heb. 10:22-25).

CHAPTER 12

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

MICHAEL MCDANIEL

T*HIS WRITER EXTENDS HIS* sincere thanks to the elders of the Southaven Church of Christ and to their esteemed evangelist, B. J. Clarke, for the opportunity to speak on the 1998 Power Lectureship. It is a high honor for me to contribute a manuscript to this year's significant lectureship book. The theme of the Godhead is a marvelous theme of tremendous importance. These thought provoking lessons will bless our great brotherhood for many years to come. It is our prayer that they will elicit greater understanding of and greater devotion to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Holiness of God is a topic which should stir our hearts and motivate our lives. The word "holy" [*hagios*] means to be separate. W. E. Vine says that the word "fundamentally signifies separated, and hence, in Scriptures in its moral and spiritual significance, separated from sin...."¹ God is separate from all others in His character and morality. This is one of His significant attributes or distinguishing characteristics seen in His relationship to man.² God's holiness is absolute. The sin of man separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2), because God is holy and separate from sin. He is holy in all that He is and does. Exodus 15:11 says, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, **glorious in holiness**, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

One of the simplest ways to define the holiness of God is “as that essential element in His nature which causes Him to hate, with perfect hatred, everything that is morally evil, and to love everything that is pure and holy.”³ This is seen in Isaiah 63:9-10:

In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.

In this text we have God’s holiness first revealed by blessing His people. He loves the good. But then we see His holiness in fighting against them as an enemy because of their rebellion. He hates the evil. In the New Testament, Jesus is also said to hate the evil and love the good. “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Heb. 1:8). God’s holiness demands that we also abhor evil and love the good and cleave to it. “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Rom. 12:9). How significant God’s holiness should be to each of us.

The Significance Of God’s Holiness Is Seen As It Resonates Throughout The Scriptures

The word “resonates” refers to that which echoes or reverberates. The idea of God’s holiness echoes loudly over and over again within the Sacred Scriptures. Especially is this the case in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Psalms, and Malachi.⁴ Note these observations from the Psalms. God sits upon the throne of His holiness

(Psm. 47:8). God speaks in holiness (Psm. 60:6). Holiness becometh the house of God (Psm. 93:5). Psalm 97:12 says, “Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; and **give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.**” Truly the holiness of God resonates in the Psalms.

Each member of the Godhead is called holy within the Scriptures. Jesus addressed the Almighty in John 17:11 as “**Holy Father.**” Of the Son, Acts 3:14 says, “But ye denied the **Holy One** and the Just...” Of the Spirit, Acts 13:52 says, “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the **Holy Ghost.**”

In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw the Lord in a vision (Christ - John 12:41). He saw Him high and lifted up. He saw the seraphim, a special class of angels. They each had six wings: two to cover the feet, two to cover their face, and two by which they flew. These angelic beings were singing one to another, “**Holy, Holy, Holy,** is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3). The idea of God’s holiness echoed and resonated in their song. The Arndt and Gingrich Greek Lexicon says that the threefold “holy” serves to emphasize that idea.⁵ When a Jew would emphasize something, he would often use repetition. To repeat something three times was to elevate it to the highest or superlative degree. This writer knows of only one attribute of God which is elevated to the third degree after this fashion. God is holy, holy, holy. The angels sung it three times, thus emphasizing the absolute holiness of God, that He is separate from all sin and uncleanness. We find a similar occurrence in Revelation 4:8:

And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, **holy, holy, holy,** Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

True worship of God begins when we recognize the significance of the holiness of God. If we see Him as the Word portrays Him, then by faith we can see Him high and lifted up as did Isaiah. Like the angels seen in Isaiah chapter six and Revelation chapter four, then we will be able to sing songs like “Holy, Holy, Holy” by Reginald Heber and really be meaning what we are singing.⁶ The glorious theme of God’s holiness ought to resonate from our mouths to the Master just as it resonates from the Message of God unto men.

We find the theme of the holiness of God resonating from the voice of noble Hannah. She offered a beautiful poem and prayer of thanksgiving unto God after the birth of her son. She called her son’s name, Samuel, which means “asked of God.” As she worshipped God with a heart full of gratitude, she said, “There is **none holy as the Lord**: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God” (1 Sam. 2:2). What sound resonated from the voice of Hannah? Did she not express the fact of the holiness of God? She knew how to worship like the angels of heaven. You can see it in her prayer. She exclaimed with thanksgiving, “There is none holy as the Lord.”

The Significance Of God’s Holiness Is Seen As It Relates To The Other Divine Attributes

In the nature of God, there are divine attributes such as holiness, justice, mercy, love and truth. Each of these are related to one another and intertwined. To illustrate this, consider how they all relate to the scheme of redemption. The cross of Christ reveals each of these divine attributes. (1) When man sinned, God’s **holiness** was offended. (2) Then God’s **justice** became active, demanding that the penalty for disobeying God’s law go into effect. (3) However, God’s **mercy** intervened through

a plan to save man. (4) God chose to send His Son as the manifestation of His **love**. (5) You can read about all of this in the **truth** of God's Word.

In reverse order, in the **truth** we read about the coming of Christ, the demonstration of God's **love**. Such was prompted by the **mercy** of God. And, Christ as a sinless sacrifice, not only appeased God's **justice**, but He also satisfied God's **holiness**. Sinful man could not have satisfied God's holiness because holiness demands holiness. Only the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God could satisfy the holiness of God.⁷

God's divine scheme of redemption was God's solution to the dilemma in which He faced of the certainty of man's sin on the one hand and the fact that he could not clear the guilty on the other (Nah. 1:3).

In His holiness, God hates evil and loves good. In His justice, God gives to every person that to which He is entitled without partiality. If God should pass over one guilty person without the demands of His justice being satisfied, He would at that point cease to be a righteous God of absolute and perfect holiness. How then could our holy God save man? God devised a plan whereby He could save man.

Christ was sinless (2 Cor. 5:21) and was willing to die in our place for our sins (Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 2:24). No one except Christ could meet the demand of a just and holy God. The vicarious death of Christ enabled the Father to be just on the one hand and the justifier of man on the other (cf. Rom. 3:23-26).

Christ would be manifest in the flesh and die on the cross to satisfy the demands of God's holiness and justice. When we accept Christ's sacrifice by an obedient faith (Mark 16:16), we can stand justified and forgiven.

The Significance Of God's Holiness Is Seen By The Reverence Which It Demands

In Acts 7:30-33, Stephen retells the events surrounding Moses and the burning bush. "Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground" (Acts 7:33). Notice how God reminded Moses of His holiness. Moses needed to see in the very beginning of this conversation the holiness of God.

We also need to be reminded of the holiness of God and the reverence it demands. The Hebrew writer stated in Hebrews 12:28-29:

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with **reverence** and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

We need to respect the holiness of God and serve Him with reverence. We need to speak in reverence and act in reverence. We need to understand that both words and actions can not only indicate reverence but also help to create reverence. This does not mean that we should try to force upon others the posture of the body they should have when they pray or anything similar. It does mean that we should teach people the principle that when we desire to bow our heads as we pray, or to use the English solemn style pronouns of thee, thou, thy, and thine in our prayers, or to close our eyes when we pray, to help create reverence or indicate reverence, then it is entirely proper for us to do so. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He chose words which showed reverence for Him in a beautiful way. "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9).

God's meeting with Moses at the burning bush clearly reveals that our reverence toward God may be indicated by an action which we perform. God required of Moses that he perform a specific outward action in order to express his reverence unto Him. What was that action? Moses was instructed to take his shoes off his feet. Later, God would tell Joshua to do so (Josh. 5:15). This was (and still is) a traditional practice in the East as a mark of reverence for holy things. God's holiness demanded reverence. Both Moses and Joshua had to express their reverence in their willingness to obey God in this act prescribed. God gave the reason for the command, "for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." It was holy ground because of the manifestation of Divine presence.

Brethren, when we come into a worship assembly, we are in the presence of God in a special way (Hab. 2:20; Matt. 18:20). Mark 14:25 says Jesus partakes of the Lord's supper with us in the Kingdom. He is with us as we partake. In effect, we are standing on holy ground. Are we showing proper reverence in our speech, in our dress, in our thoughts, and in our actions? Or do we have our minds on everything but God? Worship is no place to carry on a courtship, write notes, clip our nails, figure our taxes, or whisper plans for the afternoon. God is on the throne. God's presence makes for holy ground. His holiness demands our reverence:

Who shall not **fear** thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art **holy**: for all nations shall come and **worship** before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest (Rev. 15:4)...O **worship** the Lord in the beauty of **holiness**: **fear** before him, all the earth (Psm. 96:9).

The prophet Malachi wrote about 445 B.C. after the

people's return from captivity. The people of his day were not worshipping God in the beauty of holiness. How is this indicated? It is indicated by their lack of reverence. In Malachi 1:6 God asked, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, **where is my fear...**?" What a sad state of affairs it is when Almighty God has to ask for that which is rightfully due Him! Reverence toward God was lacking. It is seen in their contemptible sacrifices. God said in Malachi 1:8:

And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts.

They had kept the finest of the flock for themselves and had brought to the altar that which showed contempt for the very God they claimed to worship. It was unacceptable to God and would have been unacceptable to their earthly ruler as well. They did not have a proper concept of the holiness of God and the reverence which it demanded. It is seen by what they offered God in their worship. What are we offering up to God as worship? The significance of God's holiness is seen by the reverence it demands.

The Significance Of God's Holiness Is Seen By Our Corresponding Recognition Of Sinfulness

Notice very carefully the language of the following three people who were all in the presence of God. First, there is Abraham. In Genesis 18:27 as he interceded for the people of Sodom, Abraham said unto God, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which

am but dust and ashes.” Here was one of the great men of the Old Testament who is called the friend of God. Yet, how did Abraham see himself in the presence of God? He saw himself as dust and ashes. He spoke the language of humility as he contemplated the holiness of God!

Second, there is Isaiah who said in Isaiah 6:5, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” This statement comes out of the chapter in which Isaiah had seen a vision of God, high and lifted up and heard the angels cry, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Thus it is no wonder that Isaiah exclaimed, “I am undone, a man of unclean lips.” Contemplating God’s holiness brought to the forefront his own sinfulness. Again we read the language of humility.

Third, we remember Peter. There was the occasion where Peter was able to see the power of the Lord demonstrated in the catch of fish after they had fished all night and caught nothing (Luke 5:5). When he saw all the fish that had been taken by following the directions of the Lord, he was ready to fall down before Jesus and say, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). When Peter saw himself that close to the Son of God, he knew he was a sinful man. Here again is the language of humility. How revealing it is to listen to these giants of the faith speak “the language of humility” in the presence of a holy God. They show us how we ought to see ourselves as we live before God and rely on His grace.⁸

A proper view of God’s holiness can help us conquer self-righteousness and make us dependent upon His grace and mercy. It will make us as the publican who “would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

The Significance Of God's Holiness Is Seen In Its Replication In The Life Of The Saint

A replication is a copy or a duplicate. It can also refer to a reply or a response. God desires man to be like Him. When Isaiah saw the Lord, the feeling was mutual. He earnestly desired to be cleansed of his sin that he might be holy. Isaiah 6:6 states:

Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

By the angel's actions, God communicated unto him that his sin was forgiven. The significance of God's holiness should motivate us to replicate it and be holy also. First Peter 1:15-16 says, "But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

Christians have been called with a holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9). This calling comes through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:13-14). God calls us out of an unholy world to be holy like Him. We hear and answer His call when we believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3), confess Christ (Rom. 10:10), and are baptized into His death where Christ's blood was shed (Rom. 6:3-4). This is where we contact His precious blood. The demarcation line between the world and those called out of the world is reached in the waters of baptism and not one moment sooner. This is not water salvation. It is salvation by the blood. Then we must arise from that watery grave to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). We have "put on the new man, which

after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). A transformation has taken place.

A truck driver became a Christian. When someone asked him to give an incident that showed he was different now that he was a Christian, the trucker replied, “Well, when somebody tailgates my truck, I no longer drive on the shoulder of the road to kick gravel on him.”

God expects our new-found faith in Christ to be reflected in the way we now live (1 Pet. 4:3-4). This has always been His divine plan. Ephesians 1:4 says:

He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

The saints of God have been called into a holy place. Christians have been called in one body (Col. 3:15), which is the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Paul says this is the church of Christ, “In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21). The church is God’s holy temple in whom He dwells today. It is to be comprised of those who love the good and hate the evil, who replicate the holiness of God.

Brother M. C. Kurfees used to say that looking at the lives of certain members made it difficult to determine where the church ended and the world began and where the world ended and the church began. What would brother Kurfees say now if he could witness so many in the church today?

We must remember that Jesus is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23). Those who are saved will be those who are holy. Ephesians 5:27 says He will:

present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but

that it should be holy and without blemish.

The holiness of God must be replicated in the lives of the Saints.

The Significance Of God's Holiness Is Seen In The Resolution Christians Must Make

First, we must resolve that we will be **cognizant of sin**. Sin needs to disturb us in view of God's holiness and the words of His holiness. We must be like Jeremiah who said, "Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets;...because of the Lord, and because of the words of His holiness." He spoke of adultery in the land, of how both prophet and priest were profane, and of the wickedness in the house of God (Jer. 23:9-11). He was cognizant of sin and disturbed by it. If our hearts are not broken because of the sin we see around us, it may be that we are not appreciating the significance of the holiness of God like the prophet Jeremiah did.

Second, we must resolve that we will **continue as saints**. Paul admonished the Christians at Corinth not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). He reminded them that they were the temple of the living God and in the holy presence of God (2 Cor. 6:16). For God to be their Father and for them to be His children, they had to live separate lives (2 Cor. 6:17-18). Then Paul exhorts:

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved,
let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the
flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear
of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

This must be our attitude and action if we would be pleasing unto God.

Third, we must resolve that we will be **committed to serve**. To be holy means we have been set apart for the service and use of God. It was after Isaiah's sins had been purged, and He had been made holy, that he was now ready to fulfill God's commission as a messenger to the people. The Lord then said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:8-9)." Isaiah was committed to serve and ready to do so because his sins were forgiven.

Paul commissioned Timothy to commit the things he had learned to "faithful" men who would be "able" to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2). The one who speaks for God must have both faithfulness and ability. There have been too many cases in which men possessed great talent as public speakers, and yet failed to live lives of holiness. Isaiah was called unto holiness and so are we. "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thess. 4:7). Why was Isaiah ready to say, "Here, am I send me?" Was it not because he was thankful for his cleansing from sin? Did he not wish the same for others? God has given us a great commission (Mark 16:15-16). There is a work that we all can do. Realizing the significance of God's holiness, we should deepen our daily commitment to serve the Lord to the best of our ability.

Fourth, we must resolve that we will be **consecrated at the Savior's second coming**. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." First Thessalonians 3:13 should be our prayer, "To the end he may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." At Christ's coming, holiness will be our chief concern. The judgement will be a great exhibition of God's holiness. In that day His abhorrence of evil and love for good will be most apparent. Only the holy will be allowed to enter the

holy city in Heaven above. Only the holy will have the opportunity to blend their voices in singing, “**Holy, Holy, Holy**, Lord God Almighty!”

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless (2 Pet. 3:11-14).

The significance of God’s holiness is seen: (1) as it resonates throughout the Scriptures, (2) as it relates to the other Divine attributes, (3) by the reverence which it demands, (4) by our corresponding recognition of sinfulness, (5) in its replication in the life of the saint, and (6) in the resolutions every Christian must make. Is the significance of God’s holiness seen in our lives?

Endnotes

1 W. E. Vine, **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), 266.

2 J. J. Turner and Edward P. Myers, **Doctrine of the Godhead** (Abilene, TX.: Quality Publications, 1985), 47-49.

3 Roy H. Lanier, Sr., **The Timeless Trinity for the Ceaseless Centuries** (Denver, CO.: Roy H. Lanier, Sr., 1974), 99.

4 See Gary Summers’ excellent discussion on the emphasis of holiness in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and

Malachi in his chapter, *How Can I Be Holy As God Is Holy; Practical Christianity: Daily Christian Living* (San Antonio, TX.: Shenandoah Church of Christ, 1998), 535-539.

5 Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, trans. by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 9.

6 For treatment of this song, see B. J. Clarke, "Holy, Holy, Holy: *Lessons In Lyrics* (Thirty-Second Annual Memphis School of Preaching Lectureship, 1998), 436-457.

7 Wendell Winkler, *The Holiness of God; What Do You Know About God?* (Independence, MO.: Williams Publishing, 1985), 243-244.

8 Winfred Clark, "The Language of Humility" in *The Expositor*, Vol. 2, No. 7, Sept. 25, 1991, 1-2.

CHAPTER 13

THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

BILL BRYANT

IT IS TRULY A GREAT JOY and privilege to participate in this great lectureship. Once again B.J. Clarke, the lectureship director, has chosen a great theme and developed it in marvelous fashion with faith-building and timely lessons from some of the brotherhood's finest preachers. It is my fervent hope and prayer that this lectureship book will help to fill the tragic void of knowledge in our brotherhood of the only true God. Knowing brother Clarke and the godly elders at Southaven as I do, I know this book is sent forth with the same spirit as that of the apostle Paul on Mars Hill when he saw people blindly worshipping the idols of the land. Paul firmly and bravely spoke of the true God of heaven knowing that all will one day stand before Him in judgment (Acts 17:31). Knowing the terror of the Lord, Paul persuaded men (2 Cor. 5:10). May these lessons on the Godhead persuade good and honest hearts to prepare for the judgment and help bring about the needed revival in our land.

Definition And Supporting Passages

The Lord God has said,

...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, that I am the LORD which exercise **lovingkindness**, **judgment**, and **righteousness**, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD (Jer. 9:23-24).

We truly serve a God who wants to be known and understood. Ignorance and misconception of any of His attributes will lead to an assortment of false doctrines. For example, many believe that God will allow all religious people to enter heaven even though many different paths will be traveled. They believe God's exercise of lovingkindness will allow man freedom to determine his own path to heaven, even though quite sinful. But as Jeremiah recorded, God will also exercise judgment and righteousness. These equally important items are ignored today because of the general lack of understanding of the immutability of God. Many believe that God has changed in His approach and attitude toward mankind from the Old Testament to the New Testament. They believe the God of wrath has given way to the God of goodness, mercy and grace, and that judgment and righteousness aren't as important to Him today as it once was. In other words, God has changed! Is this true? How we answer this vitally important question determines how we will live before God and set our course for eternity. It is that important!

By basic definition, to say that God is immutable is to mean that He does not change or cannot change. There are a number of Bible passages that support the doctrine of God's immutability:

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 (Numbers 23:19)?

And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent (1 Samuel 15:29).

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end (Psalm 102:25-27).

For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed (Malachi 3:6).

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us (Hebrews 6:17-18).

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever (Heb 13:8).

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (James 1:17).

The Bible clearly presents God as immutable, unchanging. When God promises something, He will always be faithful and true to His Word. He will always

be completely reliable and faithful in His dealings with man. God's nature today is the same as it always was, and it will remain the same. J. I. Packer expressed this point accurately and forcefully when he wrote:

Men sometimes say things they do not really mean, simply because they do not know their own mind; also, because their views change, they frequently find that they can no longer stand to things that they said in the past. All of us sometimes have to recall our words, because they have ceased to express what we think; sometimes we have to eat our words, because hard facts refute them. The words of men are unstable things. But not so the words of God. They stand for ever, as abidingly valid expressions of His mind and thought. No circumstances prompt Him to recall them; no changes in His own thinking require Him to amend them.¹

God's faithfulness and truthfulness can and must be clearly seen by those who seek His face. When we read of a blessing offered that could not be reversed (Num. 23:19-20), a kingdom lost that could not be returned (1 Sam. 15:29), a promise of redemption through the seed of Jacob that could not be broken (Malachi 3:6), and the assurance of Heaven because God cannot lie (Heb. 6:17), we have the building blocks that will help to establish a strong and sure foundation for a life of faith.

Alleged Contradictions

There are several Bible passages that some believe contradict God's immutability. We will examine four such texts. Our response to these texts will provide, in principle, the answer to other alleged contradictions.

1. The days of Noah. Genesis 6:5-6 says:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

This occurred during the days of Noah when wickedness filled the earth. God's "repenting" that He had even made man seems, to some, to contradict the statement made in 1 Sam. 15:29 that God does not repent.

2. The golden calf. In Exodus 32 we find the account of the children of Israel building and worshipping a golden calf while Moses is on Mt. Sinai receiving the law of God. God was ready to "consume them" (Exod. 32:10) because of their sin. Moses then pleads to God not to destroy the people. Exodus 32:14 tells us "the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." Is this a contradiction of God's immutability?

3. King Saul's sin. 1 Samuel 15 records the incident where King Saul failed to obey God concerning the Amalekites. He was told to "go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not" (1 Sam. 15:3). King Saul failed to obey God because he was so fiercely determined to please the people who wanted to bring back some of the spoils (1 Sam. 15:24). God said of Saul after his sin, "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king..." Some would ask, "How can an immutable God repent that He made someone king?"

4. The city of Nineveh. The book of Jonah records the story of Nineveh's repentance that led to God's repentance. Eventually, Jonah went to Nineveh and told them that God was ready to destroy them. The Word of God accomplished its' intended purpose. The king of Nineveh led one of the greatest revivals in the history

of mankind. His hope of survival is recorded in Jonah 3:9, “Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” His hope became reality when “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them...” (Jonah 3:10).

How are these Bible passages that speak of God’s “repentance” and others like them to be reconciled with those passages that clearly state God’s unchanging nature? If God is immutable in His will and nature, how can He change His mind when things don’t go well among His people? Does it suggest a lack of foreknowledge of what man will do or is it a problem of insufficient power and means to carry out His purposes? The key to these passages is to understand that God’s announced plans are conditional. Jack Cottrell explains:

Sometimes the Bible pictures God as announcing his intention to do a certain thing, then “relenting” or “changing his mind” and deciding not to do it after all. An example is Jonah’s message to Nineveh: “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). But the king of Nineveh called on his people to repent, saying, “Who knows, God may turn and relent [nacham], and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?” (Jonah 3:9) And sure enough, “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it” (Jonah 3:10). Later Jonah describes God as “one who relents concerning calamity” (Jonah 4:2).

How may this be explained? The most obvious answer is that quite often an announced course of

action is conditional, depending on the human response to the announcement. This may be true even if the condition is not specifically stated. Thus in the case of Nineveh, the complete message would be, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown, unless you repent in the meantime.” But what warrant do we have for assuming this was the intent of the passage? We have the unassailable warrant of God’s own explanation of how he operates in such cases. In Jeremiah 18:7-10, he says, “At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent [nacham] concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of [nacham] the good with which I had promised to bless it.”²

There are other great passages in Jeremiah that show the conditional nature of God’s promises. For example, in the opening verses of Jeremiah 26 we have the record of God’s willingness to withhold the punishment that was to come upon a sinful nation “if so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings” (Jer. 26:3). God’s willingness to withhold punishment was contingent upon the nation’s repentance. God went on to say, “Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you” (Jer. 26:13). God could be influenced to change His mind if certain conditions were met. Jack

Cottrell drives the point home when he writes:

It follows from the preceding point that the significant change in the conditional cases is in others, not in God. God's own heart is ready to bless or curse, depending on the relative righteousness or unrighteousness of people (or in some cases on the fervency of prayer). When the people themselves change from one relative state to the other, they come into a different relationship to God, whose own attitudes toward sin and righteousness do not change.³

This is a consistent theme throughout the Bible. Promises of blessings or curses are made to men by a God who can and will carry them out. Man's actions determine many of God's actions. When man responds in obedient faith to the standard God has given him, God is faithful and true to His Word to bless him because of His immutable nature. When man responds in unrighteousness, God has no other choice but to condemn and punish.

A most profitable study for anyone seriously interested in pleasing God would be to go through the Bible and note the conditional promises that God has made. Time and space considerations do not allow significant comment, but please observe a sampling from the book of Deuteronomy. Moses rehearses the blessings that lay ahead for God's people if they were faithful to the covenant.

Wherefore it shall come to pass, **if** ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers: And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of

thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee. Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle. And the Lord will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee. And thou shalt consume all the people which the Lord thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve thy gods; for that will be a snare unto thee (Deut. 7:12-16).

But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, **if** thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God (Deut 8:18-20).

For **if** ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; then will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves. Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be. There shall no man be able to stand before you:

for the Lord your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you. Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, **if** ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: and a curse, **if** ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known (Deut. 11:22-28).

These passages show clearly the conditional nature of God's promises of land and other blessings for the descendants of Abraham. God would bless if they obeyed and curse if they disobeyed. God possesses the foreknowledge to know how man will respond and, therefore, does not have to "change His mind" when it happens. His response of either reward or punishment is already predetermined and will always be consistent with His nature and purpose. They are built into His eternal purpose and His marvelous plan of redemption that reflects that purpose.

When considering alleged Bible contradictions of God's immutability, it is also helpful to examine the origin of the Hebrew word translated "repentance" in the KJV. Marvin Wilson writes, "The origin of the Hebrew word *nacham* seems to reflect the idea of breathing deeply, hence the physical display of one's feelings, usually sorrow, compassion, or comfort."⁴ **Strong's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary** defines it on page 77 as "...to sigh, i.e. breathe strongly, by implication, to be sorry, i.e. (in a favorable sense) to pity, console or (reflexively) rue; or (unfavorably) to avenge (oneself)." This helps to shed light on the passages we considered earlier that are often mentioned as Bible discrepancies. John McArthur explains the situation for us:

Genesis 6:6 says that when God looked at the debauchery of mankind in the pre-Flood civilization, He “was sorry that He had made man on the earth.” God had made man for blessing, and man had turned God’s blessing into a curse. God’s will and His character were unchanged. He would reward good and punish evil. But man had changed, and God was sorry for what man would suffer in judgment. He has no joy when judgment falls (2 Peter 3:9).⁵

Most parents can easily relate this to a situation where promises are made to our children of some kind of blessing or favor with the condition that their behavior remain acceptable. We are then saddened and sorrowful when we tell them their shortcomings will prevent their participation in that endeavor that was truly important to them. We are forced to “repent, to change our mind” about their going. This does not, however, reflect a change of our own nature. It shows instead a consistency and loyalty of commitment to our plan and purpose in raising our children. When God said of Saul’s disobedience, “It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king” (1 Sam. 15:11), God was not revising His plan for Saul. He had appointed Saul as king with the commission to “hearken... unto the voice of the words of the Lord” (1 Sam. 15:1). It was God’s plan for Saul to be an example of obedient faith before the nation of Israel. Saul failed miserably in that role and God, therefore, was extremely sorrowful. The kingdom would be taken from Saul (1 Sam. 15:28) not because God was mutable, but because Saul violated the purpose and will of an unchanging God.

The same could be said of Nineveh. When they heard the message of God through Jonah, the king of Nineveh led the nation in repentance hoping that God

would spare them. They were spared, not because God is fickle and capricious, but because God saw the desired action that was consistent with His will and nature. Once again, man's actions determined God's actions. If man obeys, God blesses and blesses again. If man disobeys, sorrow and grief will fill the great heart of God and punishment will surely come!

God's Faithfulness

A vital component of God's immutability is His faithfulness. When one understands that God is ever and eternally the same, he can know that God will be true to His Word and keep every promise. One of the grandest themes of Holy Scripture is the faithfulness of God. Why is God so faithful? Paul answers in 2 Tim. 2:13, "...yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." God's faithfulness is rooted in His very nature. What is His nature? He is all-knowing with infinite understanding (Psm. 147:5) which enables Him to determine a perfect plan and purpose that will take into consideration the future conduct of mankind, both good and bad. He has all-power which enables Him to do whatever He pleases (Psm. 115:3). He fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:24) which enables Him to be everywhere He needs to be. His righteous nature enables Him to keep His every word and promise (Neh. 9:8). To sum up, when an all-knowing, all-powerful, completely righteous, and omnipresent God promises something, He can and will be faithful to it. This theme is repeated again and again in Scripture:

Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy **faithfulness** reacheth unto the clouds (Psm. 36:5).

Thy **faithfulness** is unto all generations: thou

hast established the earth, and it abideth (Psm. 119:90).

They are new every morning: great is thy **faithfulness** (Lam 3:23).

God is **faithful**, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:9).

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is **faithful**, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it (1 Thess. 5:24).

But the Lord is **faithful**, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil (2 Thess. 3:3).

If we believe not, yet he abideth **faithful**: he cannot deny himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is **faithful** that promised (Heb. 10:23).

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a **faithful** Creator (1 Pet. 4:19).

If we confess our sins, he is **faithful** and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Our Almighty God has the desire to save souls and the capability to devise a plan of redemption that would be consistent with His nature while respecting the free moral agency of man. Contained within are numerous promises authored by One who can keep them.

Benefits Of God's Immutability

We mentioned in the introduction to our lesson that the way we view God's immutability will determine how we live before Him and will set our course for eternity. Tremendous and life-changing benefits come to those who understand God's immutability.

1. Understanding God's immutability is the basis for our own faithfulness to Him. As we come to know that an immutable God is faithful to His every word and promise, we are far more inclined to obey Him even though it might be demanding and deemed unpopular by the world. Note the connection between God's faithfulness to His promises and obedient faith in Hebrews 11:8-13:

By **faith** Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By **faith** he sojourned in the land of **promise**, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same **promise**: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through **faith** also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, **because she judged him faithful who had promised**. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all

died in **faith**, not having received the **promises**, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Our Almighty God is not going to change. Nor will He change His Word. He has promised the best for His people. He can and will deliver. You can count on Him. Understanding this will enable Him to count on you.

2. Understanding God's immutability is the basis for our peace of mind. One of the marvelous outgrowths of trust is peace of mind. For example, when we know that our marriage partners are faithful and constant, we can abide in peace and security. There's no need to worry about their love for us growing cold or their tiring of us as time goes by. A.W. Tozer provides the following comment that shows the relationship between immutability and peace:

In this world where men forget us, change their attitude toward us as their private interests dictate, and revise their opinion of us for the slightest cause, is it not a source of wondrous strength to know that the God with whom we have to do changes not? That His attitude toward us now is the same as it was in eternity past and will be in eternity to come?

What peace it brings to the Christian's heart to realize that our Heavenly Father never differs from Himself. In coming to Him at any time we need not wonder whether we shall find Him in a receptive mood. He is always receptive to misery and need, as well as to love and faith. He does not keep office hours nor set aside periods when He will see no one. Neither does He change His mind about anything. Today, this moment, He feels

toward His creatures, toward babies, toward the sick, the fallen, the sinful, exactly as He did when He sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for mankind.

God never changes moods or cools off in His affections or loses enthusiasm. His attitude toward sin is now the same as it was when He drove out the sinful man from the eastward garden, and His attitude toward the sinner the same as when He stretched forth His hands and cried, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”⁶

3. Understanding God’s immutability gives us the courage to be strong in the challenges of life.

There will be occasional hardships and persecution for the faithful Christian (2 Tim. 3:12). What assurance does the Christian have that God has not turned against him? The apostle Peter answers with inspired Scripture, “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a **faithful Creator**” (1 Pet. 4:19). God’s immutability will guarantee the safety of one’s soul. The Christian can then be strong and courageous knowing that God is in control. What assurance does the Christian have that God will not allow on him more than he is able to bear. Paul answers by saying:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: **but God is faithful**, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).

What vital bit of information enables the Christian

to hold fast to the profession of his faith during the tough times. The Hebrew writer explains the reason behind it, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; **(for he is faithful that promised...)**” (Heb. 10:23).

4. Understanding God’s immutability also lays the foundation for a life of hope for the future. Notice again the example of Abraham and that which enables the Christian to live the life of hope:

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. **Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel,** confirmed it by an oath: that by **two immutable things,** in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to **lay hold upon the hope set before us:** which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil (Heb. 6:13-19).

God’s immutability is the basis of a Christian’s sure and steadfast hope. God has made promises that He has kept down through the corridors of time because it is impossible for Him to lie. The faithful child of God can then live “in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2). An Almighty God, that cannot change, will surely bring it about.

The Negative Aspects Of God's Immutability

In our introduction, we saw that our God is a God who will exercise “lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness” (Jer. 9:24). People today speak gratefully and freely of His lovingkindness. Unfortunately, they ignore the judgment to come. It will surely happen because God is immutable! Arthur Pink explains:

Herein is terror for the wicked. Those who defy Him, who break His laws, who have no concern for His glory, but who 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 eyes 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.⁷

In conclusion, the knowledge of God's immutability opens up the door to a life of service and blessings. We can truly live with the knowledge that we are God's children. We can learn and treasure the fact that we belong to Him and that He will faithfully supply all of our needs. We know that He will finish the work He began in us (Phil. 1:6). Every aspect of His nature remains the same and always will. In a world that is constantly changing, God alone remains true. His love for His people will never diminish.

The same, however, is not true for the unbeliever. As John McArthur explained:

The knowledge that God does not change can be

terrifying. God has said that the soul that sins will die. He will not altar His decree. His Word says that the wages of sin is death, and that will be just as true at the final judgment as it was when it was written. Although He may feel grief, God will not soften His position on sin. The Bible says in Psalm 119:89, “Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.”

Our God is indeed immutable, unchanging! He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). But He has assured us that the unfaithful will be consigned to an eternal hell. Nothing will change Him from His purpose. Any change that might be required will be required of us!

Endnotes

1 J.I. Packer, **Knowing God** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973) p. 70.

2 Jack Cottrell, **What The Bible Says About God The Redeemer** (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1987) pp. 496-497.

3 Cottrell, p.498.

4 Marvin R. Wilson, **Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) p. 570.

5 John McArthur, Jr., **The Ultimate Priority** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983) p. 51.

6 A.W. Tozer, **The Knowledge of the Holy** (New York: Harper and Row, 1961) p. 59.

7 Arthur W. Pink, **The Attributes of God** (Grand Rapids,

CHAPTER 14

SINS AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

BOBBY LIDDELL

Appreciation

ASSOCIATION WITH THE ELDERS, preachers, and members of the Southaven Church of Christ is pleasant, uplifting, rewarding, and encouraging. Preaching and teaching in the Memphis area has afforded this writer a true blessing by being in proximity of this great church, and, because we share a kindred spirit, of having sweet fellowship one with another. Again, this year, the Southaven church is worthy of commendation for her sacrificial work in having this great lectureship. Especially worthy of commendation are her godly elders whose oversight has guided the brethren to great success in doing the work of the Lord, her preachers whose faithful proclamation of God's Word has shone as a beacon in a world seemingly growing ever darker, and her members whose love, equalled by courage, has motivated them in faithfully following Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of God. May God's richest blessings continue to be bestowed on the Southaven Church of Christ.

Introduction

Why should we study the subject of "Sins Against the Holy Spirit," and how shall we proceed? First, this

is a Bible subject, mentioned in at least six different passages; thus, it naturally engenders the interest of all Christians and Bible students. The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, has much to say about the Holy Spirit, His personality, nature, work, indwelling, and His relationship with the Father, Son, church, and individual Christians. We want to study the Bible, including this Bible topic, because we are interested in knowing the Truth, applying the Truth, and teaching others the Truth, to the ultimate end that we, and all whom we may reach and teach, may be saved now and eternally (1 Tim. 4:16; Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus said “to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). Pilate asked, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Many sincerely ask the question, “What is truth?” and it is a good question, when sincerely asked, deserving an answer. What is the answer? God’s Word is Truth, as Jesus, on a previous occasion stated: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Most would readily agree that, concerning the Holy Spirit, there is much misinformation set forth as if it were the Truth, cleverly disguised as Truth, and designed to be received as Truth. Sometimes, the dispersal of misinformation is unintentional and is the result of ignorance of what the Bible teaches. However, far too often, the misinformation serves the evil purpose of the perpetrator(s), illicitly advancing him and/or his cause; whereas, the Truth would defeat him, quickly and completely exposing his error and the invalidity of his doctrine’s claims (John 3:19-21). Sadly, much modern denominational error centers in a calculated misinforming of its followers about the Spirit. One can only wonder if the so-called “faith healers” and “miracle

workers” even believe their own claims, or if they have so hardened their hearts, they are willing to deceive the simple and unsuspecting for financial gain—at whatever cost spiritually.

As there is much misinformation, so there is much misunderstanding. The misunderstandings among the followers of men are great and multiplied. They affect attitudes towards Deity, towards what obedience demands, and towards salvation itself. Many shall be lost because they have accepted a false view of the Spirit which results in their entrapment in fatal error (for example, the false doctrine of “irresistible grace” purported by Calvinism and its adherents, and necessitated to support their false doctrine of “total hereditary depravity”). Even some brethren have difficulties and face dangers in this area. In the light of the aforementioned, the study of “Sins Against the Holy Spirit” is a study of current and continuing interest. Let us enter into it with open minds, and open Bibles, seeking to know the Truth, and to live by the Truth.

Yes, good brethren may not agree with one another on every aspect of the Spirit, not even on the meaning of the passages under consideration in this study, but we must be careful to temper ourselves when differences arise where no fatal error is involved. Let us seek to understand God’s Word, knowing He has communicated it to us for our understanding (Eph. 5:17; 3:3-4). We need to ask ourselves, “What would we know **about** the Holy Spirit without the Bible?” We cannot know the nature and work of the Spirit by the emotions, physical senses, or worldly wisdom. Without the revealed Word, we would be in the dark on this subject. Again, “What would we know **from** the Holy Spirit without the Bible?” He has, through inspired men, revealed God’s Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Eph. 6:17). So, to the Word let us

go to study the subject at hand.

Who Is The Holy Spirit?

Notice the question asks not “What Is the Holy Spirit?” but “Who.” The Holy Spirit is not a “what.” He is not an indistinguishable glorified “it,” not a scary ghostly apparition, nor some better felt than told feeling, mysterious influence, essence, vapor, phantom force, or inexplicable nudging. He is not the Bible, nor is He a substitute for the Bible, but the Word of God is His sword which He wields in conviction, conversion, and sanctification (Eph. 6:17). He is not unclean (cf. Matt. 12), nor unholy, but is the “Holy” Spirit, perfectly holy (Psm. 51:11). The Holy Spirit is not a false teacher, creating confusion, lying, and deceiving men with false and contradictory messages, per, “The Holy Spirit appeared to me, and told me the end will be soon,” or, “He spoke to me and told me there is one present who needs miraculous healing.” The Holy Spirit is not miraculously empowering men today (1 Cor. 13:8-10; cf. Mark 16:20). He is not Jesus, nor is He the Father. He is not the one to whom we pray, nor through whom we pray (Col. 3:17). The Holy Spirit is not a respecter of persons, choosing to save some and not others. He is a Spirit, as God is a Spirit (John 4:24), and Jesus is a Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). Why then should the word “Spirit” cause us to be so perplexed?

The Holy Spirit is a member of the Godhead, and, as such, is equal in Deity to God the Father and God the Son. Another will address the relationship of the members of the Godhead, and to his chapter you are directed for more information. Briefly, the Godhead consists of three persons, not three Gods, nor three manifestations of one person, but three persons who are one in Divine nature, united in Deity. The word for God

in Genesis 1:1 is plural (cf. v.26), indicating more than one person, each sharing eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, creative power, and Divine will (cf. Heb. 9:14; Mic. 3:8; 1 Cor. 2:9-13; Rom. 15:30; Gen. 1:1-2). The Holy Spirit is a member of the Godhead (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Mat. 28:18-20; Rom. 15:30; 2 Cor. 13:14); thus, He is Deity, and is equal in the Divine nature with God the Father (Matt. 6:9), and God the Son (John 1:1-3), because of His being God the Spirit (Acts 5:3-4). The Holy Spirit, as a member of the eternal Godhead, is a person, not a human being, but a Divine person. As a person, He has the attributes of personality. Just one of these attributes is that He speaks (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Sam. 23:2), and, speaking, He taught, reminded, and guided the apostles into all truth (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13).

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:13).

He has the characteristics of a Divine person as demonstrated by the ways in which men can sin against Him. Men may blaspheme (Matt. 12); lie to (Acts 5); resist (Acts 7); grieve (Eph. 4); quench (1 Thess. 5); and despise (Heb. 10) the Holy Spirit. Only a person; that is, an individual, could suffer such against himself. Thus, the Holy Spirit is a person, a Divine person, and is a member of the Godhead.

How Can Man Sin Against The Holy Spirit?

How does man sin? To answer, we must know what sin is. According to God's Word, sin is transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4), unrighteousness (1 John 5:17),

acting against what one holds to be true and right (Rom. 14:23), or failing to do the good he should (Jas. 4:17). Sin involves rebellion, disrespect, rejection of God and His way, refusal to do right (be righteous), neglect, or omission.

Sin carries a heavy penalty (Rom. 6:23). It brings both guilt and consequences. While every sin is indeed sin, it is the case that one sin may be worse in the sense of consequences, or in the scope of the sphere of its influence. A deadly outcome of sin is that sin separates man from God (Isa. 59:1-2). If one continues in sin, unforgiven, he will be separated from God eternally (Matt. 25:41; John 8:21-24). Thus, sin demands repentance, restitution, reconciliation, and restoration. The sinner must give up sin, as one said, "Get out of the sinning business," and seek forgiveness according to the will of God.

All sin is sin against God (Luke 15:18-21). When the righteous Joseph refused the advances of his master's wife, who said, "Lie with me" (Gen. 39:7), this is how he replied: "...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9).

David understood his sin was against God:

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou Judgest (Psm. 51:2-4).

Clearly, when one sins, regardless of the nature of his sin, he sins against God. The Holy Spirit, as one member of the Godhead, is God. May one sin against

the Holy Spirit? Perhaps, you are wondering if you have. Some are interested in such a study because they genuinely are afraid they have sinned against the Spirit, others because they are simply curious, and, no doubt, others who want to set forth some peculiar doctrine. We venture to add another, which is, we want to know in order to do right and to avoid wrong, to be pleasing to God, that we might know Him now and eternally. We shall consider, in the order of their appearance in the New Testament, the passages in which are recorded sins against the Holy Spirit.

Blasphemy Against The Holy Spirit (Matt. 12; Mark 3; Luke 11)

And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. And he called them {unto him}, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house. Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith so ever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit (Mark 3:22-30).

Blasphemy is speaking against. One may speak against man, or he may speak against God (1 Tim. 1:13).

The blasphemy under consideration in this context is against the Holy Spirit. Now, it should be readily apparent that the sin under consideration is of eternal consequence for Jesus plainly said so:

But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit (Mark 3:29-30).

If it is of eternal consequence, and it is, it cannot be the sin(s) which some have defined the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit to be. Apostasy is sin, but not the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Without forgiveness, apostasy will cost one his soul, but it is possible for one to return from apostasy (Jas. 5:19-20; Acts 8:22). If not, is “once lost, always lost” true? Adultery is sin, but not the sin of Mark 3. Paul wrote of those who had been in adultery, but they had left it, and had been forgiven (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Murder is sin, but not the sin under consideration here. The murderers of Jesus, who turned from sin, were forgiven on Pentecost (Acts 2:23, 36-38, 41-42, 47). Rejecting the Gospel is sin, but not this sin, for one could, later, receive the Gospel, and obey it. If this is not the case, could one who refused the Gospel at the first occasion of his hearing it, never have another opportunity? If so, most of us, if not all of us, would be lost. Neither is this the sin of 1 John 5:16, a sin which one will not confess, and, as a consequence, for which he will not be forgiven (1 John 1:9).

This writer, at one time, held to the explanation that one might reject Christ, and later accept the testimony of the Spirit concerning Christ, and be saved; however, if one rejected Christ and, then, rejected the testimony of the Spirit, there would be no further recourse. This is a true position, but not the meaning of

the context under consideration. What, then, does it mean?

To understand, let us look at the charges made against Christ (Mark 3:22). First, the Pharisees charged that He had Beelzebub (the lord of the flies), which was equivalent to their saying He had Satan within Him. Second, they charged Him with casting out demons by the power of Satan. Consider the depth of depravity necessary for them to make such charges—to accuse the Son of God with Satanic connections, and to deny His Divine power. Christ’s quick response with His irrefutable arguments, and proclamation of the eternal danger of such sin was necessary to prevent the spread of their false charges. The devastating potential of this sin was such that Jesus pronounced an eternal anathema upon it.

Jesus put the Pharisees to shame, pointing out the absurdity of their charges. He said, (1) How can Satan cast out Satan? (Jesus had cast out a demon); (2) A divided kingdom cannot stand (if Satan cast out a demon, his kingdom would be against itself); (3) A divided house cannot stand; (4) Satan divided against himself cannot stand; (5) One who takes a strong man’s goods must be even stronger, and must first bind the strong man (Jesus was stronger than Satan as exhibited by His power to cast out the demon); and, (6) If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out (as Luke 11:19 shows, there were those, “your sons,” who claimed power to cast out devils; and, if so, from whence did they receive their power?)?

To charge the Son of Man with being in an unholy alliance with Satan, possessing an unclean spirit was to call the Holy Spirit a devil. Suppose Jesus had not pronounced an eternal damnation upon such a sin, what could have happened? He could not have, by His

miracles, proved His Deity (John 20:30-31), and their accusations would have stopped His mission dead in the water.

Such was the awful condemnation that we never again read of this sin being committed.

Lying To The Holy Spirit (Acts 5)

To understand this sin against the Holy Spirit, we must look back to Acts 4:32. Because of the current need of those in Jerusalem, who were lacking the daily necessities:

...as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need (Acts 4:34-35).

Barnabas sold land and brought the price to the apostles. Ananias and Sapphira also sold a possession, but, upon bringing part of the price they received for the sale, lied, and said that was the total amount. Why? Perhaps they wanted to be known for being liberal and sacrificial givers while keeping some of the money also. It is interesting to note Peter said they were not required to sell the possession, nor were they required to give the proceeds after it was sold. In fact, they were not required to give all the price of the sale, if they had wanted to give part. What then was the problem? They lied about it:

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan

filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things (Acts 5:1-5).

Death was the result, the immediate punishment for their sin (Acts 5:5-11). Yet, we have all lied, and we were not put to death physically and immediately (cf. 1 John 1:6-10). Fortunately for us, God does not, today, put to death immediately as He did then. However, we will die, spiritually and eternally, if we continue in the sin of lying (Eph. 4:25; Rev. 21:8). Obviously, there was something about their particular sin that invoked such a response from God. What was it? They lied to the Holy Spirit, God!

How did they lie to the Holy Spirit? By lying to Spirit guided men. If they could lie to the apostles, and so deceive them that they got by with it, undetected, that would have proved the apostles were not miraculously gifted to discern their lie; thus, showing they did not have the power and authority from God which they claimed, and were not endowed of God to lead the church. Such would have worked to undermine their authority and leadership, and to harm greatly the young church, so God put an immediate stop to it. Notice, too, that God's action got the attention of the church and as many as heard what happened, and contributed to believers being "added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:11,14).

Is it possible for men to commit the same sin today? Circumstances are different for there are no

miraculously endowed apostles living upon the earth today. Thus, the exact situation cannot be duplicated. At least in these ways, though, men can come near to the same sin committed by Ananias and Sapphira. Men may try to test the authority of God, seek to deceive God Himself, and deny the authority of the Spirit given book, God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). If one lies about the Scriptures given by the Spirit, that which the Spirit has testified (John 15:26), he lies against the Holy Spirit.

Resisting The Holy Spirit (Acts 7)

In the great sermon preached by Stephen, the first Christian martyr, he accused the unbelieving Jews of resisting the Holy Spirit. Rehearsing the history of God's dealing with the nation, leading up to the coming of the Just One, Christ, he concluded with this charge:

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).

Their response was one of anger:

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth....And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit (Acts 7:54-59).

How did they resist the Holy Spirit? Notice verse 51, "as your fathers did, so do ye." Well, what did their

fathers do? Their fathers persecuted the prophets (v. 52; cf. Matt. 5:12), but why? Because the prophets delivered the message, from God, that condemned their sins, and warned them of punishment. For example:

And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the Lord, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjathjearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah. And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; And Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, namely, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him into Egypt. And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people (Jer. 26:20-23).

But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy (2 Chron. 36:16).

Their resisting the Holy Spirit was in resisting the message given by the Holy Spirit. As their fathers “despised his words,” and so, “mocked the messengers of God,” and, “misused his prophets,” so did they. What was the final straw, that which made them grind their teeth? Stephen’s telling them they had resisted the Holy Spirit in that they had not listened to the inspired prophets who foretold of Christ, but they had betrayed and murdered Him, and had not kept the law (which they claimed to uphold).

In resisting the Holy Spirit, they rejected His

Word. Contrary to what the Calvinists claim (a miraculous direct action of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the sinner which, they say, is “irresistible”), men can resist the Holy Spirit! If, today, one refuses to hear the Word, he resists the Spirit (Eph. 6:17; 1 Cor. 2:9-13; 1 The. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:9-12; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Rom. 10:17; Psm. 119:11).

Grieving The Holy Spirit (Eph. 4)

But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:20-32).

How does one grieve the Holy Spirit? Notice the

context. Paul wrote to the Ephesians to put off the old man and put on the new man, and listed the sins which they were to leave behind, as well as the positive attributes they were to have. Sin (any sin, all sin) grieves God. One does not have to be Hitler to live so as to grieve the Godhead. There is no inconsequential, insignificant, unimportant, “little” sin in the view of God, because sin causes one to be lost. The end is hell (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 21:8).

God hates all sin and has gone to the limit to save men from sin (Rom. 5:8-9; John 3:16; Eph. 2:1; 1:7; 5:26-27; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; Mat. 19:3; Luke 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:3; Heb. 9:28; 1 John 2:2). Certainly, this shows the cost attached to sin, and the price paid by God to make possible forgiveness. Just as there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, there is grief over one sin committed (Luke 15:7). Why? God is love (1 John 4:8), loves us as His children, and hurts over our sins because of His love. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is grieved by our committing sin (Isa. 63:7-10).

Quenching The Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 5)

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:14-22).

To quench is to put out, as one would quench a fire. How can one put out the Holy Spirit? Look at the context. “Despise not prophesyings.” There were inspired men who prophesied (taught), and, being inspired, they taught as directed by the Holy Spirit. Obviously, there were some others who were claiming to prophesy, but were not delivering the truth. As a result, some members of the church were giving up, turning away from all prophesying, quenching the message from the Spirit.

Instead of shutting out all prophesying, Paul instructs them to “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” To prove is to test or try, with the view of approval (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; 1 John 4:1). After testing, keep the good, hold it fast, and abstain from all appearance of evil. In other words, when evil is found, when it appears, abstain from it. However, do not throw out the baby with the bath water! Prove the teaching (prophesying), hold to the good, and abstain from the evil. Do not quench the Spirit by refusing inspired teaching and preaching.

Despising The Holy Spirit (Heb. 10)

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment,

suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:23-31).

To despise is to hold in contempt. How could those, to whom Hebrews was written, despise the Spirit of grace? The problem especially addressed in this epistle is that the Hebrews (Christians of Jewish descent, probably in Jerusalem) were leaving the Christ and Christianity to go back under the Old Law. They were holding in contempt the church of Christ. One's attitude toward the church is His attitude toward Deity. Is this not what Jesus said to Saul when He said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" What had Saul (Paul) been doing? He had been persecuting the church (Acts 9:1-4).

Note that in the context, the writer of Hebrews exhorts them to hold fast their profession of faith, not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, but to exhort one another. He then warns them of the result of their going back to the Old Law. They would forsake the only sacrifice for sins, Christ, and would put themselves in the fearful position of sorer punishment, facing the vengeance of the Lord in judgment and fiery indignation. Thus, holding in contempt the church which was eternally purposed by God (Eph. 3:11), preached by God (Mark 1:14-15), and purchased by God (Acts 20:28), was to do despite to the Spirit of grace.

Can men commit this same sin today? Certainly, in the sense they might hold the church in contempt.

Sadly, many who were called out of the world by the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), turn away from the Gospel, to go back to the world (2 Pet. 2:20-22), living as if they had never known Christ, forsaking the assemblies of the church. Though they might loudly protest they still have faith, their actions prove otherwise. In truth, they hold in contempt that which God has pronounced holy.

Conclusion

Let us all determine to live so as to show our love and respect for God, to turn from all sin, and seek ever to live purer and better lives. Let us look to the Word as the Divine Standard by which we must live, for by it we shall be judged (John 12:48).

CHAPTER 15

THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD

KEITH B. COZORT

ONE OF THE SONGS our children used to sing in Bible class said, “Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there’s nothing our God cannot do!” It is to the thought expressed in this song that we turn our attention.

It will be our purpose to cover the material as follows: 1) Definition of terms; 2) Names or descriptions of God show His power; 3) Statements about God concerning His power; 4) Demonstrations of God’s power; 5) Limitations on God’s power; and 6) Comfort we attain from God’s power.

Definition Of Terms

When we talk about the omnipotence of God it is most assuredly needful for us to define our terms.

Omnipotence. “The noun ‘omnipotence’ is not found in the English Bible, nor any noun exactly corresponding to it in the original Hebrew or Greek.”¹ Even though the word itself is not found in Scripture the concept is certainly taught in God’s Holy Word. According to Webster’s Dictionary omnipotence means, “the state or quality of being omnipotent.”² The word omnipotent means, “having unlimited power or authority; all-powerful - **the Omnipotent God.**”³

The adjective ‘omnipotent’ occurs in Revelation

19:6; the Greek for this, *pantokrator*, occurs also in 2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:15; 21:22 (in all of which AV [Authorized Version - K.B.C.] and RV [Revised Version - K.B.C.] render 'almighty')...In *pantokrator*, the element of 'authority,' 'sovereignty,' side by side with that of 'power,' makes itself more distinctly felt than it does to the modern ear in 'omnipotent,' although it is meant to be included in the latter also.⁴

Therefore, when we discuss the omnipotence of God we are talking about His unending, unduplicated power and the authority which is inherent in that power.

God. We are referring to the God of the Bible. The God who is presupposed when we read, "In the beginning God..." (Gen. 1:1). The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exod. 3:6).

Names Or Descriptions Of God Show His Power

In Bible times names were more than just words used to distinguish one person from another. They oftentimes spoke of an individual's character. The various names for God, given in the Scriptures, serve as descriptions of His nature, character, attitudes and abilities. There will be an entire chapter dealing with the names of and for God but there are a couple I wish to mention briefly since they relate to the subject of God's omnipotence.

El. This is the most common Hebrew word for Deity. It's original meaning is suggested to be "power," or "fear," but there is a great deal of disagreement among Hebrew scholars:

The name 'El' is a very ancient Semitic term. It is also the most widely distributed name among

Semitic-speaking peoples for the deity, occurring in some form in every Semitic language except Ethiopic.⁵

It can certainly be shown that within its meaning are the ideas of strength and power. It also denotes God's greatness or superiority.

Elohim. This is a general Hebrew term for God which is found over 2,500 times in the Old Testament. It provides us with our initial glimpse into the God of the Bible when we read, "In the beginning God..." (Gen. 1:1). It is plural in form but is used with singular verbs and adjectives. Many linguists believe the plural indicates the majesty or magnitude of God. Elohim "stands for God as Creator and Supreme Being."⁶

El Shadday. This is a compound name suggesting the Almighty God. Its New Testament equivalent is the word *pantokrator* which carries the idea of "all powerful" as we noted earlier.

Statements About God Concerning His Power

The Bible certainly emphasizes the power of God. There are many statements made in Scripture which give us insight into His omnipotence.

Angels. Gabriel, the angel, while talking with Mary concerning the Son of God whom she would bear and the son whom Elizabeth would bear in her old age says, "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

Men. At the close of the book of Job we read, "I know that thou canst do every thing" (Job 42:2). In Jeremiah's prayer to God he says, "...there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jer. 32:17). Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah demonstrated their belief in the power of God when they faced execution in the fiery furnace by

Nebuchadnezzar. Their courageous response to King Nebuchadnezzar's demands to bow down to the golden image or burn was, as follows:

O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. 3:16-18).

The Lord. While the Lord was talking with Abraham concerning the son which would be born of Sarah, we read, "...Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (Gen. 18:12). The Lord inquired of Abraham as why Sarah laughed at such an idea. Then the Lord asked Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the **Lord**?" (Gen. 18:14). The implied answer to the question is, "No! There is nothing too hard for the **Lord** that is in the realm of possibility."

After discussing the question of wealthy individuals finding it difficult to enter into the kingdom of God, the disciples ask, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus responds by saying, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:26-27). Our Lord does not say nor imply that it will be easy for the wealthy to enter into heaven but He says it is not impossible.

While praying in the garden of Gethsemene Jesus stated, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). Here, Jesus acknowledges that it was possible for God to remove this

cup of anguish but the decision would be left up to the Father in heaven.

Demonstrations Of God's Power

Throughout the Bible we read concerning the demonstrations of the power of God. In virtually every book of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, we are shown the awesome, unlimited power of God.

Creation. With the opening words of the Old Testament we behold the omnipotent God; "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Such a brief statement of fact for such a tremendous result! The Almighty One demonstrated His power through an "ex nihilo" creation, meaning a creation of something out of nothing. It was "fiat creation," meaning creation by command. The Psalmist records, "By the word of the **Lord** were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth" (Psm. 33:6).

Consider the extent of His creative work merely from the perspective of the enormous size of the universe:

1. We are told the Milky Way galaxy, our galaxy, has an estimated diameter of 20 billion light years.⁷ It is so large it would take 100,000 years to travel across it's diameter if we could travel at the speed of light, which is 186,317.6 miles per second.
2. Our galaxy is said to contain over 100 billion stars, which would have been created on day four along with our sun and moon (Gen. 1:14).
3. There are an estimated one billion galaxies.⁸
4. Our closest neighboring galaxy is the Andromeda galaxy, which is an estimated two million light years away.

The Psalmist was certainly correct when he said,

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psm. 19:1)

The Crossing of the Red Sea. In Exodus 13 we have the account of the children of Israel, an estimated 3 to 3½ million people, fleeing Egyptian bondage. Moses is instructed by God to lead them “before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon” (Exod. 14:2). Having reached the Red Sea, Pharaoh’s armies pursue them for the purpose of bringing the Hebrews back into Egyptian bondage. The people become afraid and Moses tells them:

Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the **LORD**, which he will show to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever (Exod. 14:13).

Moses is then told by God, “Lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea” (Exod. 14:16). What happened next truly demonstrated the omnipotence of our God!

And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the **LORD** caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left (Exod. 14:21-22).

God demonstrated His almighty power over nature in dividing the sea and opening a path for the Hebrews to cross on dry land. Some estimate that the water at the place where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea was eighty-

four feet deep.⁹

A few years ago a copy of an article written by Jim Bobo came to my attention. The article was entitled, “Fabulous Facts and Figures!” In this article he states how the Quarter-Master General in the Army gave several figures on how many provisions would be needed to care for the children of Israel in the wilderness on a daily basis. These provisions included the total amount of water needed to drink and wash a few dishes (11,000,000 gallons); the amount of food required (1,500 tons); even the amount of firewood which would be needed for cooking food (4,000 tons). Then he makes this interesting comment:

They had to get across the Red Sea in one night. Now, if they were on a narrow path, double file, the line would be 800 miles long and would require 35 days and nights to get through. So, there had to be a space in the Red Sea, 3 miles wide, so that they could walk 5,000 abreast to get over in one night.

I don’t know how accurate these figures are, but if they are even close to being correct it truly demonstrates God’s awesome power.

The Sun Standing Still. This event took place after the defeat of Ai (Josh. 10:1). The city of Gibeon made peace with Israel because they were greatly afraid of Israel. Gibeon was “a great city, as one of the royal cities” (Josh. 10:2). Five kings of Canaan, led by Adonizedek, King of Jerusalem, allied themselves to fight Israel at the city of Gibeon. These five kings planned “to kill two birds with one stone.” They wanted to defeat the Israelites but they also wanted to punish and destroy the city of Gibeon because of their peace agreement with Israel. Joshua and his army marched all night in order to reach Gibeon in time to help with the battle.

The forces of the five kings were greatly disturbed by the **Lord** (Josh. 10:10). Israel chased them toward Bethhoron. Joshua says:

The LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword (Josh. 10:11).

When Joshua saw that the Amorites had been delivered into the hands of the Israelites he said to the **Lord**, “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon” (Josh. 10:12). The text goes on to say:

So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel (Josh. 10:13-14).

The critics and sceptics of the Bible have long used this account as an example of it’s “lack of credibility.” They insist this is an example of the Bible being filled with myths, fables and vivid imagination.

To the Bible believer, and believer in the omnipotence of God, this event may be difficult to explain, but what miracle isn’t? Explain the creation of all living things and the entire universe from nothing! Explain how an ax head floated on the water! Explain how a man named Lazarus who had been dead for four days was raised from the dead, other than by the power of the Almighty God!

Brother Brad Bromling states there are various explanations given for this event and he considers four of

them.¹⁰ First, some would suggest we should consider the account in a figurative sense therefore concluding a miracle did not take place. The idea behind this proposed explanation is that God helped Israel defeat the five kings in such a short amount of time that it seemed to Israel as though the day had been extended:

...it must be borne in mind that it is not stated that God lengthened that day at the request of Joshua almost an entire day, or that He made the sun stand still almost a whole day, but simply that God hearkened to the voice of Joshua, i.e. did not permit the sun to go down till Israel had avenged itself upon its enemies. This distinction is not without importance: for a miraculous prolongation of the day would take place not only if the sun's course or sun's setting was delayed for several hours by the omnipotent power of God, and the day extended from twelve to eighteen or twenty hours, but also if the day seemed to Joshua and all Israel to be miraculously prolonged; because the work accomplished on that day was so great, that it would have required almost two days to accomplish it without supernatural aid.¹¹

This explanation is not acceptable because there is no indication in the text or context that would cause us to conclude that figurative language was being employed. Brother Bromling reminds us that “a cardinal rule of interpretation is that a passage is to be considered literal until proven figurative.”¹²

Second, others suggest that the language is to be taken figuratively and explain the events as purely naturalistic. This too is totally unacceptable to those who will honestly examine the account as given by Joshua. This event was in no way natural. Remember Joshua

says, “And there was no day like that before it or after it” (Josh. 10:14).

Third, some suggest this was a local miracle. Their explanation says that somehow the sun's rays were refracted miraculously in order to give the appearance of the day lasting longer than normal. Even though it is possible that it is a localized miracle there is no indication from the Scriptures that such was the case.

Fourth, others accept the account, literally believing the sun halted miraculously. This is really not a correct assessment of what would take place because the sun does not rotate around the earth but the earth around the sun. Therefore, if taken literally, the earth would have to halt and this would have resulted in global catastrophes.

Brother Bromling points out that each of these explanations has met with a considerable amount of criticism. Brother Wayne Jackson gives another explanation.

The traditional view, however, is that the length of that ancient day was actually prolonged by a retardation of the earth's rotation upon its axis. Professor Leon J. Wood has argued that only this latter view does justice to the language of the sacred text. He suggests that expressions like “stood still,” “stayed,” and “hastened not to go down” (vs. 13) “definitely indicates a change in pattern movement (*A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 148).¹³

Whatever the explanation, and we may never know for sure, it was a tremendous display of the power of our God! Another point pertaining to the long day of Joshua which has been made by brethren Bromling and Thompson needs to be noted and heeded:

A final thought on this subject needs to be addressed. The story occasionally circulates that:...NASA scientists were checking the position of the sun, moon, and planets 100 years from now and 1,000 years from now in order to plot space craft trajectories. As they ran their computers up and down the centuries, their machines came to a grinding halt because they showed a day missing about the time Joshua lived.... This story is purely fictional. Computers do not have the ability to make such a discovery, and every effort to contact the scientists allegedly involved has resulted in either failure or denial. The July, 1989 **Bible-Science Newsletter** carries an excellent article which debunks this farce.¹⁴

Resurrection Of Christ

The ultimate demonstration of God's omnipotence is the resurrection of our Lord. When the disciples of Christ placed His dead body in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea it was, I'm sure, the darkest and most painful day of their lives. The Son of man, the Son of God, was dead. How could this have happened? Wasn't He the promised and prophesied Messiah of the Old Testament? The Passover Sabbath which followed must have been a heart breaking day. Their deliverer was in the tomb!

It was on the first day of the week when the women, those who had attended to Jesus while he was alive, came to the tomb bringing spices to anoint His dead body making the final preparations for His burial. Upon arrival an angel said unto them, "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28:5-6). The women are then instructed to go "tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead" (Matt. 28:7). When Peter

and John arrive at the tomb they find the linen clothes lying where the body of Jesus had been placed. The napkin which had been around his head was setting by itself (John 20:6-7). The eleven disciples are instructed to go to Galilee and Jesus would meet them there (Matt. 28:7, 16). What a glorious day! He which was dead is alive for ever more!

Seven weeks after the resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, Peter would stand up with the eleven and preach to the Jews concerning the resurrected Christ saying:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it (Acts 2:22-24).

The apostle Paul will later state that the resurrection of Christ from the dead was a demonstration of the greatness of God's power to those who believe (Eph. 1:19-20).

Limitations On God's Power

Are there limitations on the power of an Almighty God? The answer is, Yes. These limitations are ones He has placed upon Himself. "God **can** do whatever is possible to be done, but He **will** do only what is in harmony with His own nature."¹⁶

Critics of the concept of an omnipotent God say that if a being was truly "all powerful" then he would be able

to do such things as make a four sided triangle or make a ball which is entirely black and entire white at exactly the same time. By such, they are implying that these things could be accomplished if a being had enough power. Such is not the case. The very nature of the proof they require of omnipotence is self contradictory and illogical. A triangle by its very definition is, “a geometrical figure having three angles and three sides.” Therefore a four sided geometric figure cannot be a triangle. God’s omnipotence does not rest upon His being able to do things which are self-contradictory. Therefore we cannot expect Him to make a triangle with four sides or a ball that is entirely white and entirely black at exactly the same time.

God is limited by His nature. Our God is holy. Peter informs us that as Christians we are to conduct ourselves as “obedient children” (1 Pet. 1:14). He further explains, “as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Paul tells the Thessalonian brethren, “God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (1 Thess. 4:7).

Since our God is holy and righteous we know we can have confidence in the things He has said and the promises He has made. Paul tells Titus that God made promises before the world began and He “cannot lie” (Tit. 1:2). The Psalmist says His judgments “are true and righteous altogether” (Psm. 19:9). Therefore, our God is limited to always telling the truth and cannot lie!

God is limited by man. Due to man’s free will, we can keep God from accomplishing many good things which He desires to accomplish. This does not mean that God’s goals and objectives will not be met or fulfilled, simply that they will not be accomplished through us, if we make the wrong decisions.

Jesus illustrated this point. Shortly before His

betrayal by Judas, Jesus mourned over the city of Jerusalem. Our Lord said:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together; even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (Matt. 23:37-38).

God desired to do many great things through those of Jerusalem but by their free will decisions they chose not to allow Him to meet those objectives through them.

Here is another example. It is God's desire for all mankind to be saved; "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). He does not want anyone to be condemned to a devil's hell for eternity (2 Pet. 3:9). Yet, Jesus taught in His "Sermon on the Mount" that the saved would be few in number (Matt. 7:13-14). Part of the reason would be their unwillingness or neglecting to do "the will of the Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Therefore, by their decisions and lack of obedience to His will, they limit God's ability to bless them with the eternal reward of heaven.

Comfort We Attain From God's Power

The omnipotence of God provides great comfort for faithful Christians because we know "our God whom we serve is able to deliver us" (Dan. 3:17) from whatever may threaten us.

When Paul asked the question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35), the implied answer was, "we are the only ones who can separate ourselves

from Christ love.” As Christians, we can separate ourselves from Christ’s love by the decisions we make and the things we do or participate in.

Paul gives us great words of comfort as to God’s unceasing love which He bestows upon His children when he says:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

It is comforting to know that our God is always on our side, if we are on His side.

Conclusion

We have shown by the very definition of God, along with His names and descriptions given in the Bible, plus the statements from Scripture concerning His great power, and the demonstrations of His power, that our God is truly All Powerful. His power is even shown in His self-imposed limitations, which includes allowing man’s free moral agency to limit His effective use of an individual or individuals.

All of this gives us supreme comfort in the fact that, “Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there’s nothing our God cannot do!”

Endnotes

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CHAPTER 16

THE GODHEAD AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

TED J. CLARKE

Introduction

HOW WONDERFUL *IT IS* to be here today speaking on the Power Lectureship. This is a splendid congregation with dedicated and talented elders, soul-loving and Bible quoting preachers, and a family of sacrificing and faithful members. I am, of course, delighted that B. J. is still serving this congregation and that he has well-planned another tremendously important lectureship on the eternal theme of the Godhead: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I am honored and humbled to speak to you on this crucial topic.

The letter she wrote to “Dear Abby” was both heart rending and shocking! Her twenty-two year old daughter had been killed by a drunk driver, who spent less than six months behind bars:

In 1988, my beautiful 22 year old daughter was killed by a drunk driver. At first, I screamed, “He not only killed her, he killed me too—only I can’t die!” I then got on my knees and begged God: “You can do anything. You can perform miracles. You can bring my daughter back to life. Please, God, let me trade places with her—please let me lie in that coffin, and let her out to live her life. She is only 22, God. She has never been

married or experienced the miracle of being a mother. I am old. I have lived. I've had my chance at life, but she hasn't. Please, please, let me trade places with her. You can do it. . . . As you can see, Abby, I'm still here—and not because I want to be, either. Mostly because I don't have the guts to pull the trigger or take the pills to get me out of the terrible pain and loss I live with every minute of my life. God didn't see fit to bargain with me. God doesn't plea-bargain like men do. . . . God didn't answer my prayers and I resent being told that I have no right to question God. If there is a God, and if I ever get to meet him face to face, you can bet your life I will have plenty of whys for him to answer. I want to know why my little girl died and that drunk was allowed to go on living. . . . I am mad that I am having to live in a world where she no longer lives, and I want to know why. . . . [S]urely [God] has a heart and soul that are capable of hurting just as I hurt. Why would he not expect to be questioned if he has anything to do with miracles? I don't fear the Lord. And I don't fear hell, either. I know what hell is like. I've already been there since the day my precious daughter was killed. Please sign me
... **A BEREAVED MOTHER**¹

What this mother wrote likely is indicative of what many others have felt but have never verbalized publicly. Grief and suffering have entered her world in overwhelming measure through the “untimely” death of a dearly loved one. She would trade places with her daughter in an instant, but however long she prayed, “God did not answer nor bargain with” her. Accordingly, she is angry and demands that God answer her “Whys?”, especially “why my little girl died and that drunk was

allowed to go on living.” Furthermore, she suggests that God has a heart and soul like those whom He made in His image. Her point seems to be that if God truly knew the pain and hurt she feels, He would never allow tragedies like this to happen. Her final remarks bear evidence of defiance toward God, no doubt spoken from her tremendous pain. She claims to neither fear God nor hell, since she believes she has been in hell since her daughter’s death.

Abby’s response was weak: “There are no easy answers. . . . [Y]ou know how comforting Compassionate Hands [organization] can be. . . your only other ally is time, which has a way of healing broken hearts.” Even as we criticize Abby, we wonder what we might say that would be more comforting. “A Bereaved Mother” such as this lady would be unlikely to listen to logical arguments as to why these things happen. Her only satisfaction would be for God to somehow move His cosmic computer mouse to “Edit,” and then click on “Undo,” bringing her daughter back to life **now**.

The lady above is only an individual case that could be multiplied millions of times in almost any year of this world’s history. One author, after giving several such individual cases, mentioned the Holocaust, when Nazi Germany killed six million Jews in European death camps such as Auschwitz and Belsen. Adults and children, male and female, sick and healthy Jews were given poisonous gas and then had their bodies burned in huge ovens prepared for such atrocities. The word “holocaust” comes from a Greek word meaning “burned whole.”² Noting the fear of the Jews, that this horrible event in their history should ever be forgotten or minimized by comparison with other such “orgies of violence,” this author says:

Yet the sad truth is far worse: in this century

alone it [holocaust] is only one of a string of similar holocausts. Probably 10 million will die in central Africa from AIDS. Twenty to 50 million Chinese died under Chairman Mao. The same percentage of Cambodians died under Pol Pot as Jews under Hitler. We do not know how many Soviet citizens died under Stalin. The suffering inflicted by Idi Amin is incalculable. What shall we say about “natural” disasters? Each year hundreds of thousands die of starvation; millions suffer from malnutrition. Twenty-five thousand died in the earthquake in Mexico City; two hundred thousand perished in a similar disaster in China. . . . And how many so-called natural disasters, especially starvation, are the result of uncontrollable “natural” forces, such as drought, and how many stem in part from evil structures that human beings have created—despotic governments, tribal warfare, unfair trading practices, unqualified avarice?³

To this we might add that many who suffer are innocent children, or the poor and elderly who do not have the means of avoiding some situations where they suffer greatly. Why should this be so? Why should it be that so many luxury and first class passengers were saved from the Titanic when it sank, but nearly all the poorer passengers who could only afford lower class accommodations lost their lives? No doubt some have questioned why God allowed this tragedy to happen as it did. Well, the lady who wrote to “Dear Abby” is not the first to ask hard questions about the pain and suffering in the world. Can we expect satisfying answers to any of these questions? Without anticipating all of the answers which might be given, perhaps it would be well to note that though this lady wished she were dead and felt as if she were dead, she could not bring herself

to end her life. In spite of her tremendous emotional distress, she still valued life (with its pain) over death.

The “Problem” Of God And Evil Stated

The so-called “problem” of God and evil does not involve a single issue, but many. Simply stated, the question is asked, “How can an all-powerful, good God let bad things happen to us?”

Perhaps the present day philosopher who is quoted most often as saying that evil, pain, and suffering disprove the existence of God is J. L. Mackie. However, Mackie says that believers do not have to surrender their faith when they accept his criticisms. All one must do is to admit that there are no rational proofs for the existence of God.⁴ Isn’t he generous?

The problem of evil, in the sense in which I shall be using the phrase, is a problem only for someone who believes that there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good.⁵

Since Christians do hold that God is all-powerful and wholly good, we must seriously consider that the problems Mackie proposes are attached to our beliefs. Mackie states the problem in the following way:

God is omnipotent: God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once **must** adhere and **cannot** consistently adhere to all three.⁶

If the problem is not apparent by the quotation

above, a further statement by Mackie will help. He notes that additional clarification is required if his claim is to be accepted or tested, and herein lies the area of weakness which brother Warren will later expose. Mackie insists:

...that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good, omnipotent things exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.⁷

Mackie is not the first to formulate this proposed problem against the existence of the Judeo-Christian character of God. Lactantius attributes a similar mindset to the Greek philosopher, Epicurus (340-271 B. C.), who, although not an atheist like Mackie, believed that, given the amount of evil in the world, "God has no interest in anything."⁸ The consequences of Epicurus' conclusion are as bad or worse than Mackie, to have a god that cares nothing about the suffering on earth. Truly, that would seem to make all suffering pointless.

Many Jews have drawn the same basic conclusions as Mackie, that there can be no all-powerful, good God who would allow such suffering as the Jews experienced during their holocaust:

Any God who would permit the Holocaust, who could remain silent during it, who could "hide His face" while it dragged on, was not worth believing in. There might well be a limit to how much we could understand about Him, but Auschwitz demanded an unreasonable suspension of

understanding. In the face of such great evil, God, the good and the powerful, was too inexplicable, so men said “God is dead.”⁹

Does the extent and degree of some suffering justify the conclusion that God does not exist? To reiterate, from another pair of authors, the problem for Christian theists is the conjunction of the following propositions.

1. God exists.
2. God is all-powerful [omnipotent].
3. God is all good [omnibenevolent].
4. Evil exists.

Affirm any three and you must deny the fourth, it seems. If God exists, wills all-good, and is powerful enough to get everything he wills, then there would be no evil. If God exists and wills only good, but evil exists, then God does not get what he wills. Thus he is not all-powerful. If God exists and is all-powerful and evil exists too, then God wills evil to exist. Thus he is not all-good. Finally, if “God” means “a being who is both all-good and all-powerful,” and nevertheless evil exists, then such a God does not exist.¹⁰

Since it is assumed (as per Mackie, et al.) that an all-powerful, all-good God (some add all-knowing or omniscient) **would** eliminate all evil; and, since it is agreed by all that evil does exist;¹¹ then it must be the case that the God of Judeo-Christian theism does not exist. How we reconcile this dilemma is the problem of “theodicy.”

Resolving The Apparent Problem

In an abbreviated form this lecture will present some essential elements of a theodicy.

Theodicy. From *theos*, “God,” and *dike*, “justice”; a term used to refer to attempts to justify the ways of God to man. A successful theodicy resolves the problem of evil for a theological system and demonstrates that God is all-powerful, all-loving, and just, despite evil’s existence.¹²

As complex as theodicy is, we cannot cover all of its aspects in a brief work. Primarily, we will follow the work of brother Thomas B. Warren, as we try to show that the contentions of atheists like J. L. Mackie can be adequately refuted. The book by brother Warren that we previously cited, **Sin, Suffering, and God**, is basically his doctoral dissertation presenting a theodicy that answered J. L. Mackie.¹³ In my opinion this book is the best theodicy of those I had time to research, although there are others mentioned in quotations and the bibliography. We shall consider, as concisely as practicable, brother Warren’s refutation of Mackie’s challenge to basic theism (belief in God), adding some pertinent points from the writings of others.

Mackie’s Additional Propositions

Remember Mackie’s three original propositions were: (1) M1: God [assuming He exists] is omnipotent; (2) M2: God is wholly good; and (3) M3: Evil exists.¹⁴ Mackie views this as a contradiction, but in addition to his basic propositions set forth above, Warren notes that Mackie admits his proposed contradiction is not clear (that if evil exists then the God of Christian theism cannot exist) without some further clarifying propositions. Warren lists Mackie’s first three propositions as M1, M2, and M3, and continues the number with:

M4: Good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.

M5: There are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do.

M6: A good omnipotent thing eliminates evil **completely**.

M7: A good, omnipotent thing exists.

M8: There is a logical contradiction involved in the conjunction of propositions M7 [a good omnipotent thing exists] and M3 [evil exists].¹⁵

In preparing his defense against Mackie's claims, Warren admits agreement with M1, M2, M3, and M7, but he denies M4, M5, M6, and M8.¹⁶ In preparation for his defense of the existence of the Christian God, Warren listed twenty-two propositions he would sustain.

Warren's Twenty-two Propositions

Proposition W1: God is omnipotent [all-powerful].

Proposition W2: God is perfect in goodness [omni-benevolent].

Proposition W2a: God is omniscient [all-knowing].

Proposition W2b: God is perfect in justice.

Proposition W3: Evil exists.

Proposition W3a: Sin (that which contradicts man's sonship to God and his brotherhood to man) is the only intrinsic evil.

Proposition W3b: It is not evil that there is evil.

Proposition W3c: Evil results in every case from an abuse of the free moral agency of man.

Proposition W4: It is **not** the case that good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.

Proposition W5: It is **not** the case that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing (being) can do.

Proposition W6: It is not the case that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely.

Proposition W7: A good, omnipotent thing exists.

Proposition W8: It is **not** the case that there is a logical contradiction in the conjunctions of propositions W7 and proposition W3.

Proposition W9: This world is as good as any possible world for the purpose God had in creating it (i. e., to be the ideal environment for “soul-making”).

Proposition W10: Every instance of human suffering results from some condition(s) which was necessary to providing man with the ideal environment of “soul-making.”

Proposition W10a: God is not blameworthy for having created a world in which both righteous and wicked persons suffer during earthly life.

Proposition W10b: God is not blameworthy for having created a world in which there **seems** (to some people, at least) to be dysteleological [pointless] suffering.

Proposition W11: Every instance of animal pain results from some condition(s) which was necessary to providing man with the ideal environment of “soul-making.”

Proposition W12: Every instance of natural calamities (tornadoes, earthquakes, etc.) results from some condition(s) which was necessary in providing man with the ideal environment of “soul-making.”

Proposition W13: Man’s earthly life is a probationary period (i.e., during which his fate in eternity is settled) and it is his only **probationary** period.

Proposition W14: Man is immortal (i. e., man will live on after physical death in a non-probationary “period” which is non-ending).

Proposition W15: The “stakes” in eternity (the **blessings** of heaven and the **punishment** of hell) are of such magnitude as to render all suffering in this life of no ultimate negative significance.¹⁷

Warren then discusses these twenty-two propositions under seven major themes, giving supporting proof for each grouping. Space will not permit a comprehensive look at each proposition, but we will cover those in more detail that demonstrate that there is no contradiction between the concepts of a Christian God (W1, W2, W2a, W2b) and that evil exists (W3).

Evil and the Existence of God

Atheists are actually impaled on the horns of a dilemma which they create by their admission that evil exists. While the “argument from evil” is considered one of the strongest arguments against belief in God,¹⁸ it is interesting to note that Anthony Flew (atheist philosopher from England) barely mentioned it in his 1976 debate on the existence of God with Tom Warren. Flew hinted at the argument in his first speech on the first night, but neglected to develop any formal argument until his last speech of the last night, when brother Warren had no chance to respond to it.¹⁹ After Warren’s encouragement for Flew to develop his argument from evil failed, Warren made this telling argument regarding atheists admitting “evil exists” as a way to deny the existence of God:

I am going to say this much about the problem of evil. Dr. Flew is on record in his books concerning the problem of evil. He seems to accept this as a sort of basis of proceeding: that if evil exists then God does not exist. That would constitute a first premise. Evil exists. Therefore, God does not exist. But let us note how easily this argument is refuted. First of all, his first premise is false. If the evil referred to is *real objective* evil and not just a matter of *taste* or *opinion* (subjective evil), then the premise should read, if evil exists, then God exists. Because, you cannot have *objective moral*

law, in the way I have already explained, unless there is the eternal Ultimate Good. This is the case because it involves the admission of a *higher objective law*.²⁰

Norman Geisler and C. S. Lewis agree with the impact of this important admission by atheists to deny God, but in truth their argument turns on them:

In each of these arguments, as well as many others that have been devised to show that there is no God, there is a built-in boomerang. As C. S. Lewis pointedly observed, one must **imply** God in order to **deny** God. To complain about unjustified evil in the world, one must also suppose an ultimate standard of justice beyond the world. In other words, if there is no absolute standard (i.e., a God who is or has an absolute moral standard), then in order to complain about unjustified evil in the world, one must “smuggle in” the concept of an absolute (such as provided by theism) and assume that there is an ultimate, absolute standard of justice beyond this world. To impugn God’s behavior based on one’s own culturally or historically derived ethic is self-defeating. If, in fact, God is there, then His ethic would naturally supersede all culturally derived ethics of men.²¹

Therefore, atheism cannot get off the ground to make its argument from evil against God, since to make the argument implies God as the Supreme Moral Lawgiver.

Scripture and the Existence of God and Evil

There seems to be another argument which fairness and logic demonstrate to be a self-defeating admission by atheists concerning the attributes of God as set forth in the Scriptures (W1 through W2b). When atheists gleefully

accept the claims of the Scriptures that God is all-powerful and wholly good, they do so because they believe that they can show a contradiction between God possessing those attributes and the existence of evil. However, if the atheists are willing to accept how the Bible characterizes God as all-powerful and completely good (because they think it proves the case against God), they are likewise obligated to deal with whatever else the Scriptures say in defense of His existence and how His total character can be reconciled with the fact evil exists.

God's Omnipotence and Evil

Atheists contend that since God is all-powerful (W1) and wholly good (W2), He is thus obligated to eradicate all evil (as per Mackie's M4, M5, and M6). Warren counters those contentions by demonstrating that the atheists' view of God's omnipotence is flawed.

First, it is not true that an omnipotent being can do anything.

God can do whatever is **possible** to be done (that is He **can** accomplish whatever is subject to **power**), and that (in harmony with His perfection in goodness and justice) He **will** do only what is in harmony with the absolute perfection of His own nature.²²

There are, however, things which God cannot do simply because some things cannot be done. They are logical absurdities that are contradictory. For example, God cannot make a married bachelor, a four-sided triangle, or a rock so huge He cannot lift it. There are matters connected with God's complete goodness which He cannot do, such as lie (Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2).

When God created man, He made him to be a **free**

moral agent, which means that man can decide to obey or disobey his Creator's will. Genesis 1-3 clearly illustrates this matter. In Genesis 2:16-17, God told Adam **not to eat** of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This information was also known by Eve, along with the penalty for disobedience (Gen. 3:1-3). It would be sheer folly to suppose that God forbade and warned Adam and Eve against doing something they could not do, because God would prevent them from deciding to do the act and acting on their decision.

Every positive requirement or negative prohibition in the Scriptures teaches explicitly or implicitly that mankind can freely choose to obey or to disobey God's will for us! Every promise of reward for obedience or warning of punishment for disobedience testifies of our free moral agency. "Free" is being used in the sense of not being forced or compelled against one's own will. When Adam and Eve sinned **they freely chose** to ignore God's command and to act as they desired (Gen. 3:6) Even though they were tempted to do what they did, being influenced by some things outside themselves (the look of the forbidden fruit, its use as food, the suggestion of enhancement, etc.), the decision to obey or disobey was theirs to make. They were influenced, but not forced, so they were free (cf. Jas. 1:12-15). When God asked, "What have **you** done?, He implied they acted freely and were blameworthy for the evil they committed (Gen. 3:9-14), and He pronounced the penalties and consequences of their sins (3:16-19).

While it is true that God can do anything that can be done, He cannot make men free moral agents and at the same time act to remove that freedom as a part of human ability, such as making men **always** choose to do what is right and good. The whole tenor of Scripture shows that God created mankind with the desire He had, that human beings freely choose to love and serve

Him. Accordingly, God could not restrict man's freedom and prevent sin(s) that would determine any person's eternal destiny. As we reflect upon God's dealing with the original pair, the truthfulness of the following comments are obvious:

No power, not even infinite power, can create a being who is a free moral agent and who is yet beyond even the possibility of sinning. This is the case because the possibility of evil is analytical to the definition of moral agency. Let it be supposed, for the sake of illustration, that God created man as a free moral agent but who **could not** sin. If he absolutely **could not** sin, what merit or value would there be in any given act of obedience or in the totality of his acts of obedience? Is it not the case that he really would not be a free moral agent at all? If so, then it is a logical contradiction to affirm that there can be a free moral agent who is beyond the possibility of sinning. It would be affirming that X is free and X is **not** free. So, it seems clear that it is absurd to ask why God did not create free moral agents who are beyond even the possibility of sinning. Having created man free, God could not guarantee that he remain free from sin. If a man must be a free moral agent in order to **become** and **live** as a son of God (in loving submission to) and as a brother (in compassionate service to) man, then he must also be free to **refuse** to become a son and a brother.²³

This section has attempted to answer matters pertaining to Warren's W4, W5, and W6.

There is one aspect of this question which deserves some attention here, which will receive more attention in the second half of this lesson dealing with the so-called "moral atrocities" which God required in the Old

Testament. For example, when God wanted to do so He prevented the sins of certain people, such as: the Sodomites in Genesis 19, when they wanted to have homosexual relations with the angelic messengers whom God sent; He likewise killed 185,000 of the army of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, when he intended to destroy Jerusalem (2 Kings 19); and God prevented king Herod from killing the baby Jesus (Matt. 2), but did not interfere with the king's order to slaughter several male children in Bethlehem two years old and under.

Why is it that God could prevent these sins, but not all sins? **First**, it is obvious that those who sought to perpetrate these sinful acts were already condemned sinners. The fact that God prevented the particular **acts** of sin which these people had already contemplated (willed to do) did not determine their eternal destinies. They would have done them if God had not intervened. **Second**, as a sovereign, omnipotent God, He would not permit the carrying out of acts which would alter His eternal plan of redeeming mankind. God would permit the destruction of Jerusalem, and Jesus would be put to death, but in the time frames which God decreed for these events, "when the fulness of the time was come" (cf. Gal. 4:4). **Third**, while God allows men to make choices which determine one's eternal destiny (to obey or disobey), He does have a limit to the amount or degree of sin which He will tolerate in certain situations.

When the degree of depravity was too great God destroyed the world by the Flood (Gen. 6:5-7). In Abraham's day God told him, "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). Several hundred years later, when it was full, God liberated Israel from Egypt and used Israel to drive the Amorites (a name sometimes used of all the pagan nations of Canaan) out of the land (Exod. 12:40-41; Deut. 7:1-2). We may not always be able to

determine “why” God acts as He does in some situations and not in others, but the three principles given above may provide some helpful insights (Rom. 11:33-36).

God’s Omniscience, Goodness, and Justice

Scripture portrays God as wholly good, opposed to all sin and evil (1 Chron. 16:34; Neh. 2:8; Psm. 145:9; Hab. 1:13; Jas. 1:12-15). Jesus spoke of the ultimate good of God’s nature (Matt. 19:16-17). Since other lessons in this lectureship will deal with God’s goodness, omniscience, and justice, these will not be discussed in detail here, except as these relate specifically to our problem of evil.

One aspect we should discuss here is a passage where God says, “I create evil.” The passage in Isaiah 45:7 reads, “I [God] form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.” It is possible that God is speaking against dualism in the pagan religions, which can still be found in some forms today. Dualism is basically the belief that there are two co-eternal sources (some believe equally powerful) responsible for good and evil. These two forces have supposedly been locked in immortal combat for eternity. Zoroastrianism is an ancient Persian form of this doctrine and dates from before Isaiah’s time; Manichaeism comes from the third century of the Christian age. A present day representative is called “process theology,” which says “[God] is directly and intimately related to all there is. Evil is simply the incompatibility of some given factors within the **ongoing growth of God**. It is this growth that is in the “process” of process theology.”²⁴ [Emphasis mine, TJC]. This type of dualism sees both elements of good and evil in God, but God is struggling against the evil, trying to eliminate it, but needs man’s cooperation to do so.²⁵ Does this verse

in Isaiah fit these wild theories? No, in fact it refutes them.

If one believes the Bible, Isaiah 45:7 is sufficient to refute dualism. In this verse God is establishing His sovereignty and omnipotence over and against all other concepts of powers that be. “I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me” (Isa. 45:5-6). There is no dualism, nor does one have to be concerned about other gods.

God’s claim here to “create evil” does not refer to moral evil or sin. The passages given at the beginning of this section preclude that idea. The word for “evil” in the verse frequently refers to punishment or calamity for sins. God can either give “peace” to those who obey Him or “evil” (punishment) to those who disobey.²⁶ Hailey says:

This is not moral evil, but the judgments which Jehovah sends into history. He is speaking of the distress and disaster which men experience from God as a consequence of their sin (cf. Amos 3:6).²⁷

It is God to whom men will ultimately answer for their reward or punishment (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10-11). Cyrus needed to know that, as all need that knowledge today. This passage does not say that God is the author or source of true evil. First John 1:5 says, “God is light and in him is **no darkness at all.**” The Song of Moses proclaims:

Because I will publish the name of the LORD:
ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the
Rock, and his work is perfect: for all his ways
are judgment [justice, ASV]: a God of truth
and without iniquity, just and right is he
(Deut. 32:3-4).

Definitions of Evil

Although we commonly use the word “evil” to speak of any kind of misfortune that befalls ourselves or others, brother Warren defines it in a more restrictive sense. Evil is real, and widely known is the pain and suffering that come from it.

Some Eastern Oriental religions, such as Hinduism, contend that evil is only illusory, that it does not truly exist. A modern form of such nonsense is found in Christian Science, founded by Mary Baker Eddy. She has said, “[E]vil is but an illusion, and it has no real basis. Evil is a false belief. . . . If sin, sickness, and death were understood as nothingness they would disappear.”²⁸ As noted previously, even most atheists do not deny that evil exists in some form. Those who deny those things which illustrate evil in our world (and call them illusions) are themselves under great “delusions” in their denial. Our concern for definitions involves us with Warren’s W3, W3a, W3b, and W3c.

Brother Warren is “concerned to uphold the view that sin (disobedience to God’s will as revealed, we assume in the Scriptures, that which contradicts sonship and brotherhood, that which involves the loss of fellowship with God) is the only real evil. . . .”²⁹ D. A. Carson agrees with this definition in his book on suffering:

In this primal sense, then, evil is evil because it is rebellion against God. Evil is the failure to do what God demands or the performance of what God forbids. Not to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength is a great evil, for God has demanded it; not to love our neighbor as ourself [sic] is a great evil, for the same reason.³⁰

Warren concludes, “Thus evil really does exist, for sin

exists: men fail to do what they **ought** to do (i.e., obey God), and they do what they **ought not** to do (i.e., disobey God).”³¹ Before discussing the world as it is and the problems of human suffering, animal pain, and natural calamities, Warren considers if “it is evil that evil exists” (W3b).

The question of whether or not it is evil that evil exists concerns whether or not God is blameworthy for evil being in the world.³

I also affirm that even though evil really does exist, it is not evil that such is the case. God created man as a free moral agent and, thus, with the freedom to contradict sonship and brotherhood; that is, with the freedom to sin. Further, since man’s freedom has been the “door” through which the only evil (sin) has come, then **man**, not God is blameworthy for the sin which occurs. . . . It should be noted also that while it is, in some cases, evil to permit evil to exist when one can prevent it, it was not evil for God to create man with the freedom (of will) which enables him to do evil. To have created him without such freedom would have made of man nothing higher than a robot or puppet. In such a case, man would not have been a moral being. But, once God had created man with freedom of will, He could not prevent (in the strict sense) his sinning without destroying man as man. It was not evil for God to create man with the **power** to do evil (sin) and to inflict pain and suffering, for such power is necessary for the power to do good. And, it is better that man should be than he should not be. Further, while it is true that God **is** responsible for there being the possibility for man to sin, God is **not** responsible for the **specific** sins committed by **individuals**. Since sin (that which contradicts sonship and brotherhood) is the only intrinsic

evil, there is nothing in the world for which God is blameworthy.³³

Thus, Warren concludes [W8] there is no contradiction between W7 and W3.

All suffering and pain ultimately go back to sin and its consequences, as set out above from Genesis 3 and the free actions of Adam and Eve. Paradise was lost, as John Milton's book suggests. Can we wish that God had destroyed the original pair and that we had never been born? Life is difficult, at times extremely so. Still, most of us have more pleasant experiences in life than painful ones. Though we can suffer tremendously, like the lady who wrote to "Dear Abby," and say we want to die, the truth is that even in this present world we want to keep on living. The statement is frequently made that God could have made this world better and still accomplished His purpose for creating the world and mankind, probably even drawing more men unto Himself, than through this present world of suffering and pain. We now explore that claim.

The Best of All Possible Worlds

This section deals with issues connected with Warren's propositions W9, W10, W11, and W12. One of the major defenses against the contention that if evil exists then God cannot exist is the question, "Given the concept that God created this world for the purpose of 'soul-making,' is this the best possible world in which such could be accomplished?" By "soul-making" we mean: to come to the knowledge of God's existence (via general and special revelation); to lead one to choose freely to believe in God, enter into fellowship with Him to love, obey, and serve Him; and to love one's fellowman as God directs.³⁴

John Hick attributes the “best possible world” proposition to 17th century philosopher G. W. Leibniz. There are variations of this concept which we have no space to investigate, but the one presented here answers the challenges atheism makes. In relation to this “best of all possible worlds,” Hick also mentions what he calls the “epistemic distance” between God and man which is necessary for free moral agency. Hick’s view of our present world is that it is one in which God has placed Himself at a “distance” from man, so that God is not so close that man is overwhelmed by God’s presence, nor is God so far away that man cannot discover His being. Man can come to know God initially and in greater degrees. In this way, Warren concludes³⁵ with Hick, God is assured of eliciting only freewill responses from man. Contrary to Warren’s belief, Hick denies the historicity of Genesis 1-3, stating that man is evolving upward from the apes to be the kind of creatures God wants us to be. Still, his thoughts on God placing us at a distance (to protect freewill) are worthy of our consideration.

In creating finite persons to love and be loved by Him God must endow them with a certain relative autonomy over against Himself. But how can a finite creature, dependent upon the infinite Creator for its very existence and for every power and quality of its being, possess any significant autonomy in relation to that Creator? The only way we can conceive is that suggested by our actual situation. God must set man at a distance from Himself, from which he can then voluntarily come to God. But how can anything be set at a distance from One who is infinite and omnipresent? Clearly spatial distance means nothing in this case. The kind of distance that would make room for a degree of human

autonomy is epistemic distance. In other words, the reality and presence of God must not be borne in upon men in the coercive way in which their natural environment forces itself upon their attention. . . . On the one hand, then, we should expect the reality of God to be other than automatically and undeniably evident to us; it will, on the contrary, be possible for our minds to rest in the world itself without passing beyond it to its Maker. But we should also expect the reality of God to become evident to men in so far as they are willing to live as creatures in the presence of an infinitely perfect Being whose very existence sets them under a sovereign claim of worship and obedience. We should expect the world to be such that, given this willingness (which is the volitional element in religious faith), we become able to recognize all around us the signs of a divine presence and activity. Men of faith will see the heavens as declaring the glory of God and will discern His hand moving amidst the events of human history. Thus the world, as the environment of man's life, will be religiously ambiguous, both veiling God and revealing Him—veiling Him to ensure man's freedom and revealing Him to men as they rightly exercise that freedom.³⁶

Brother Kerry Duke has also written a book entitled, **God At A Distance**, in which he explores the various elements involved with this concept. The book is worthy of your time and money and will help one get a better grasp of this concept. In place of Hick's phrase of "epistemic distance," Duke uses the phrase "volitional balance" to denote this distance from God:

The word **volitional** has been chosen instead [of "epistemic distance"] in order to draw

attention to the power of free, intelligent choice made possible by that knowledge. This awareness of the Creator provides opportunity for choice, but it does not guarantee what choice will be made. **Volitional** focuses on the free will of man with the complex factors associated with its exercise. The ultimate concern of Christian living is **what man does** with his awareness of God; **knowledge by itself is useless** as far as salvation is concerned.³⁷ [bold emphasis mine, TJC]

With all due respect to Leibniz and Hick, it seems to me that the apostle Paul had long ago spoken regarding this being the best possible for the purpose for which God made it.

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; Neither is he worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; **And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth**, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; **That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:** For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the

world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:24-31).

God did not make man because He “needed” to. He “giveth to all” all we need; “that” we should seek Him; and He is close enough (“not far”) to be found!

While Hick denies Genesis 3, it seems clear that the pre-fall environment consisted of a somewhat different world than mankind presently experiences. At the end of Genesis 1, “everything [God] had made. . . was very good” (verse 31). There is implied a change in the physical world (at least a change in the environment from Eden) as God said, “[C]ursed is the ground for thy sake” (Gen. 3:17), and there was to be a change in the physical health and well-being of Eve (3:16) and Adam (3:17-18), leading to death (3:19). This also seems to be the reflection of Paul in Romans 8:18-23.

It is, then, this present world in which we experience sin, pain, and suffering that we must say is the best possible world to bring fallen mankind unto God, but as free moral agents, beyond overwhelming coercion. What characteristics of this world illustrate this claim? Warren lists: (1) it **supplies** man’s basic **physical needs**; (2) it allows man to **act** as a **free** moral agent; (3) it permits man to be **challenged** regarding himself and his environment; and (4) it allows man to **learn** those things most needed about himself (physical and spiritual) and his environment.³⁸

However, in saying the above makes for the best possible world to come to God, we must admit that there are problems that confront us. In this world we have: (1) human suffering which can be or is: (a) intense and prolonged, (b) inflicted upon both the innocent and wicked,

(c) distributed out of proportion from what we think is tolerable or due, and (d) seemingly gratuitous or pointless; (2) natural calamities such as drought, famine, disease, fires, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, landslides, avalanches, etc.; (3) animal pain, for which seemingly they can do little to help themselves; and (4) moral evil in the suffering one brings upon oneself or others through committing of sins of every imaginable description, such as murder, rape, child abuse, greed, robbery, torture, adultery, homosexuality, etc. (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21). In view of these things, atheists ask, "Could not God have built a better world?" In response to such a question one may ask, "Better for what purpose?" Warren remarks:

What the atheist is here contending for is a sort of hedonic paradise in which pain, suffering, and sin do not occur...A world in which it was absolutely **guaranteed** that not even one instance of "evil" could occur, would be unacceptable as a "vale of soul-making" for at least these reasons: it is impossible to have free moral agents in such an environment, given his freedom, man needs a **challenging** environment in order to **make** moral and spiritual decisions during his probationary period, and man needs such an environment in order to be able to **develop** morally and spiritually. We assume (given Christian faith) that the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain are not the supreme ends for which the world was created. The value of the world is not to be decided upon the basis of the quantity of pleasure and pain which occur in it at any particular moment. Rather, it is to be decided upon the basis of its fitness as the ideal environment in which a man can decide whether to become a (spiritual) son of God and a brother to his fellow-man.³⁹

Thus, Warren concludes that his W9 is established, although we will discuss below some of the objections raised and the value of pain and suffering.

Responses to the Existence of Human Suffering

This section is concerned to establish the truth of Warren's propositions W10a and W10b.

Some human suffering results from sins committed by the sufferer or another person(s) (Psm. 32:1-7; 38:1-8; 31:9-13). It has already been shown that since God created us as free moral agents, He cannot override our ability to will to commit sinful acts. Suffering from such sins should lead us to avoid those things which bring suffering to ourselves or others (Gal. 6:7-8). We cannot always avoid the suffering which comes to us from the sins of others, but seeing the pain it brings to us and others, we can develop the spiritual strength to minimize sin in our own lives and teach and encourage others to do the same (Jas. 5:19-20; Rom. 6:12-23; compare with Rom. 1:32). Additionally, some suffering from our own sins may be the chastening of the Lord (Heb. 12:5-14). The writer of Hebrews tells us to consider this possibility, accept it as a measure of God's love for our betterment, and to strengthen ourselves in those areas which need improvement.

Some human suffering occurs from natural calamities such as those listed in the previous section. These things happen because of the physical world in which we live and the physical laws and properties of this environment. Some have suggested that God could have created a world where the physical laws were such that one could use rocks to build homes, but if rocks fell or were thrown they would bounce harmlessly off humans, animals, or property, like Nerf balls. Similarly, these people suggest that God could have created the weather systems to bring rain, but never develop into

storms which destroy or kill. However, there is no evidence that God could have created a physical world with its necessary properties and laws and still have such a world as God's critics envision. Such a world would not be a law-abiding world at all, but a world of chaos in which there would be no dependable systems in our environment that would develop moral decisions and promote growth.⁴⁰ In fact it may be that Job 38-41 implies that such a world could not exist, as God lists the appearance of things in our world but reminds us that we do not know (and possibly cannot fathom) the mysteries underlying these marvelous aspects of our environment.

[T]he ideal environment for soul-making [in] our world must be characterized by law or regularity of response and be of such a nature as to allow man to learn something of its conditions of response.⁴¹

Admitting that one does not always know how to explain **exactly** how each occurrence of natural calamities contributes to soul-making, it is at least true that each event teaches us of the brevity of life and of the uncertainty of its end, thus prompting each of us to be prepared to be judged by God beyond this life. These events also can be encouraging in reminding us that **this world** is not our permanent home.

Suffering in humans is also apparently random in most cases, regarding those who suffer or die. This too can contribute to the process of soul-making:

If one could be certain that he would avoid **all** such calamities by becoming a son of God (and living in submission to His will), this certainly could be a great obstacle to one's deciding to love and submit to God from the proper motive (thus

becoming a true son). It is not the case that God wants men merely to do action X, action Y, and action Z. He wants them to do those actions because of **love for Him**—no matter how great a price might have to be paid for such obedience. So, the uncertainty as to what **persons** (infants, righteous men, wicked men) will be struck by such calamities can be a vital constituent element in the total situation which is man's environment for "soul-making," his **temporary** environment, not his **permanent** home.⁴³

This random quality also applies to the intensity of suffering as well as the distribution of it. These difficulties challenge man to use his knowledge, gain new knowledge, and find better ways to relieve the degrees and distribution of the suffering, even to the point of eliminating it where possible.⁴⁴ However, we are still reminded of our dependence upon God, for, even if we are successful in conquering some types of suffering, there will always remain those areas we have not defeated, nor will we ever in this life be totally beyond suffering.

There is a case to be made for a special providence from God toward His children, but such does not exempt a Christian from all random suffering. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus implied that there are good things God will give to His children who ask for them (Matt. 6:25-32). However, the blessings of sufficient essential material blessings are contingent upon one's priority in "seek[ing] first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (verse 33). There is additional material on this point in Matthew 7:7-11. Those who ask are those who receive, which agrees with James 4:2-3. If we, as parents, give good gifts to our children, which we would not give to other children, how much more so in the case with our heavenly

Father (Matt. 7:11). Paul taught a wonderful attitude about prayer (Phil. 4:6-7), but he suffered in spite of some of his prayers (2 Cor. 11:23-30; 12:7-10). While Paul was exempted from some types of suffering (2 Tim. 4:16-18), he also knew that he would be put to death because of his faith (4:6-8). Thus, while there are blessings in this life for living the Christian life (1 Tim. 4:8; cf. Mark 10:29-30), Jesus reminded faithful Christians that there are “tribulations” in this world (John 16:32; cf. Rom. 8:37). Whatever exemptions the Lord bestows upon us as His children, because we are still in the physical world there remains a sufficient amount of random suffering to remind us that the purpose of this life is a probationary time to develop our love and service to God and fellowman.

Although we may not always know the precise cause or reason for our suffering or that which others suffer, there are benefits and greater good which may be seen only as we properly respond to them as free moral agents, seeking to love and serve God. Warren lists some of the benefits he sees in suffering:

Some of the **benefits** of suffering are: [1] it allows a life of self-denial, which is the greatest life; [2] it affords the opportunity for God to “cry out” to men in the effort to lead them to become true (spiritual) sons of God (the hearts of men are either the most tender or the most bitter during times of tribulation); [3] it affords opportunity for one to develop and grow in moral character (fortitude, virtue, courage, etc.); [4] it affords opportunity for man’s love for God and man to be **tested** in the finest possible way (one must choose suffering over sin); [5] it affords exceptional influence in bringing the wayward back to God (suffering tends to be highly conducive to leading such men to re-evaluate

their attitudes and actions); [6] it affords the basic ground for growth in compassion and love for one's fellowman; [7] it helps one to better appreciate the love which he has for others and which others have for him; [8] it helps man to better understand the love of God for him and his own love for God; [9] and it will help him to better appreciate the grandeur of Heaven in the life to come.⁴⁵ [numbers in brackets [] were added- TJC]

Animal Pain and Suffering

The objections to animal pain are much the same as others that are related to our physical world. While animals do not have spirits which are intended to develop a love for God and fellowman, there are commonalities in regard to physical pain which all physical beings share. There are also those distinctive differences which separate man from the animal world (cf. Gen. 1:26-30).

The central nervous systems (for humans and animals), although they cause sensations of great pain at times, serve a greater good in alerting physical beings by that pain to the need to attend to the hurt. As with humans, animal pain frequently "influences the animal to avoid doing certain things which could be harmful to it, and also to rest (immobilize) its body during times when activity would not allow some part of its body to heal."⁴⁶

Perhaps the most reasonable explanation for animal pain is that animals were supplied by God for man's use, and form part of the overall soul-making environment man needs to learn of God and to love Him freely. Man retains fairly complete dominion over animal life now (Gen. 1:26, 28, 30), but probably in a lesser sense than before the Fall in Genesis 3. It is doubtful that Adam and Eve needed to worry about being eaten by lions or trampled by an elephant in Eden. Animals provide sources of food,

clothing, resources for working or entertainment, and have been of unquestionable scientific and medical benefit (because of many of the common life systems humans share with them) in finding medical procedures and cures for disease among mankind and the animal world. We can relate to them in so many ways because of our common physicality in body and environment.⁴⁷ This section has dealt with Warren's W12.

Sin, Suffering, and Eternity

Warren's propositions W13, W14, and W15 serve as our concluding points with this part of the lecture. These justify the purpose of living out our lives on earth according to the plan God has for us. In his closing remarks about this world being the best possible world for the purpose for which God created it, brother Warren says:

From the foregoing, I conclude that the skeptic cannot marshall evidence from any constituent element(s) of the world from which to deduce the conclusion that God is blameworthy (for having produced such a world) and thus not perfect in goodness. And I conclude that this present world is as good as any possible world (for the purpose God had in creating it) and that, thus, God is not blameworthy for the evil and suffering which occurs in it. Apart from the view that the world was designed by God as the "vale of soul-making" for man, I do not see that the pain, suffering, and sin which occurs in the world could be justified.⁴⁸

Harold Kushner, a Jewish rabbi, had to struggle with the loss of his young son to progeria, a fatal disease in which the body ages at an extremely rapid pace. As Kushner struggled with this problem in his life, he tried to come to grips as to how God could allow such a thing to

happen to a small child. He came to accept the reality of sin and suffering as part of the life in this world, but he seriously missed setting forth a theodicy which has anything which truly helps us understand why these things are so. Basically, Kushner has a God who “is not perfect” and One whom we need to be “capable of forgiving.”

Are you capable of forgiving and loving God even when you have found out that He is not perfect, even when He has let you down and disappointed you by permitting bad luck and sickness and cruelty in His world, and permitting some of those things to happen to you? Can you learn to love and forgive Him despite His limitations, as Job does, and as you once learned to forgive and love your parents even though they were not as wise, as strong, or as perfect as you needed them to be?⁴⁹

Kushner seeks to give us a “human” God, like our parents. But God is a Heavenly Father, and the model for fatherhood comes from God to us, not from us to God (cf. Matt. 7:11; Heb. 12:9-10). Clearly, Kushner’s view of God is not from the Scripture, but developed from his failure to see how the theodicy we have presented (from Tom Warren’s book) gives answers which enable us to grow in love and service to God and fellowman, and to endure the trials of life praising God for His plan to redeem us eternally. God is not blameworthy for sin and suffering, nor does He need our forgiveness because those things are present in this life.

The superior viewpoint is seeing God’s plan for us in this temporary, probationary earthly life (2 Cor. 4:16-5:11); knowing that we will live eternally free from future sin, pain, and suffering (Rev. 21:3-5, 27), where “there shall

be no more curse” (Rev. 22:3); realizing “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). These things indeed “render all suffering in this life of no ultimate negative significance.”⁵⁰

*A Wholly Good God And “Moral Atrocities”*⁵¹

Thomas Paine was an 18th century French deist who could not accept the God of the Bible because he could not reconcile a good God with the supposed moral atrocities attributed to Him. Paine’s book, **The Age of Reason**, exclaimed that the Bible was “more than half filled [with] obscene stories, voluptuous debaucheries. . . cruel and torturous executions [and] unrelenting vindictiveness.”⁵² Strangely enough, Paine, when he was writing against the Bible,⁵³ admitted he had “neither Bible nor Testament to refer to, though I was writing against both. . . .”⁵⁴ So much for Paine’s objectivity, or lack of it, in his tirades against the Scriptures. However, in Part Two of his **The Age of Reason**, he claimed to have obtained both a Bible and Testament and said, “I have found them to be much worse books than I had conceived.”⁵⁵ The following charges from Paine were not original with him and have been frequently repeated by those who claim that a good God could not engage in such evil or command others to do so:

There are matters in that book, said to be done by the **express command** of God, that are just as shocking to humanity and to every idea we have of moral justice as anything. . . . done in modern times. When we read in the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, etc., that they (the Israelites) came by stealth upon whole nations of people, who, as history itself shows, had given them no offense; **that they put all those**

nations to the sword; that they spared neither age nor infancy; that they utterly destroyed men, women and children; that they left not a soul to breathe— expressions that are repeated over and over again in those books, and that, too, with exulting ferocity—are we to be sure these things are facts? Are we sure that the Creator of man commissioned these things to be done? And are we sure that the books which tell us so were written by His authority? . . . To charge the commission of acts upon the Almighty, which, in their own nature and by every rule of moral justice, are crimes, as all assassination is, and more especially the assassination of infants, is a matter of serious concern. The Bible tells us, that those assassinations were done by the **express command of God.**⁵⁶ [emphasis is Paine's]

A more modern and popular treatment of the same sort of charges against God and the Bible are found in two volumes by writer, song writer, playwright, and comedian Steve Allen. However, Allen is not joking about his view of Scripture. The cover jacket says, “Like Thomas Paine’s **Age of Reason**, this book highlights the errors, inconsistencies, self-contradictions, and morally repugnant episodes and characters of the Bible.”⁵⁷ Martin Gardner quotes Allen in the Foreword of the book:

The fundamentalists, of course, are caught in a trap from which there is no escape, except that of abandoning at least the more absurd of their arguments. If we start with the unquestioned assumption that there is a God and that he is, by definition, good, then it inescapably follows that the countless atrocities attributed to him

in the Old Testament are not only lies, but insulting lies at that. Since this is something that the fundamentalist cannot even consider, much less concede, they are, as I say, trapped in an intellectual prison from which there is not the slightest possibility of escape. Their greatest anger, alas, is reserved for those who would do them the great service of freeing them from their prison.⁵⁸

These quotations could be multiplied from Allen's two volumes, which total over 900 pages, but the problem is stated clearly in the quotes from Paine and Allen. How can a **good** God do what the Old Testament attributes to Him? Paine was a deist who denied that God involved Himself in the affairs of man following the creation. His god is much like that of Epicurus, mentioned earlier, a "God [who] takes no interest in anything." Allen cautiously accepts the idea of a god, but must admit he can know nothing about him.

As I have observed elsewhere, both the existence and nonexistence of God seem in some respects preposterous. I accept the probability that there is some kind of divine force, however, because that appears to me the least preposterous assumption of the two.⁵⁹

Judging God By Human Standards

If we are to condemn God, by what standard do we hold Him to account? Paine said that God's actions were "shocking to humanity and to every idea we have of moral justice." Who are "we"? From where do Paine or Allen derive their concepts of what is shocking or moral justice? Since neither Paine nor Allen believe in the Bible, how does either know what their God may be like or do? Both

men have the same problem as atheists when it comes to dealing with moral law and God. They both claim to have a God, but no way of determining His standard of morality. James D. Bales wrote:

Those who believe in God and in the existence of moral law must grapple with the problem of moral difficulties in the Bible, but those who reject God and the reality of moral law are either using an **argumentum ad hominem** or argue from principles which destroy their atheism and moral relativism. The **argumentum ad hominem** is where you take the position another person occupies, although you do not accept that position, and turn it against him. It is an effort to blow up the opponent's position from within by utilizing self-contradictions in his system. The **consistent** atheist repudiates God and moral law. Therefore, he cannot say anything is really morally wrong since the moral realm does not exist. One cannot say something is an injustice unless there is a standard of justice, nothing is bad if there is no good, nothing is immoral unless there is moral law. When one makes value judgments he makes judgments in the light of a standard of right and wrong. However, if right and wrong do not exist one cannot be consistent and condemn anything as wrong. It may be pleasant or unpleasant but it cannot be good or evil. The atheist cannot be consistent and say that something in the Bible is a moral difficulty, for if matter in motion [organic evolution] is the sole reality one cannot pass from the description of an event to an evaluation of an event. To say that something in the Bible is morally wrong is to say there is a standard of morality in the light of which one judges the event to be immoral. If man is just an animal and morality is in a state of flux and flow, how can one say anything is morally wrong? One person likes strawberries and

another person likes to inflict pain on other animals (including human animals), but who can say the latter is immoral?⁶⁰

What makes one person's individual moral code superior to another person's moral values? Can Paine or Allen prove their moral codes to be superior to the Bible? Should we take a poll? What makes any man's moral philosophy authoritative over another? Humanists say:

We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is **autonomous** and **situational**, needing no theological or ideological sanction.⁶¹

The absurdity of such a claim is obvious. If each man can frame his own moral code there would be as many moral codes as people. Such a condition is called anarchy, where every man does what is right in his own eyes (cf. Judg. 21:25). While such may sound good, to have that freedom, no society can exist in such a state of lawlessness and disorder and thankfully most societies formulate moral codes and laws for their own well-being. Who would doubt that a Creator would provide the same for His creatures made in His image? He has, in the Bible, and it is superior to all others.

Wayne Jackson shows the contradiction of ethics (morals) being autonomous and situational:

When one argues that morals are **situational**, he is suggesting that an act cannot be judged by an absolute standard; that its rightness or wrongness is dependent upon the situation. For example, it would be wrong to lie if that falsehood was hurtful to another; however, if that lie could be helpful, it is said, then it could

be right. Further, as previously indicated, morality is alleged to be **autonomous**. That word means “self law.” Every man is his **own law!** Well, if that be the case, how could there ever be a situation in which a person could do wrong?! **Human ethical autonomy and situational morality are mutually exclusive propositions!**⁶²

When one claims (or implies) that there is no absolute standard by which to judge morality, one cannot logically contend that anything is immoral. Therefore, as Bales has said, if one contends that the Bible is morally wrong (in the acts it attributes to God), that person is contending that a standard exists by which to judge the Bible’s morality. How can a person show that standard to be **the standard** by which to judge all others?

If God does not exist, no human standard can rightly be considered superior to another. If God does exist, it is not illogical to believe that He has communicated a moral standard for His creation, and that His character and acts consistent with that character will be clearly taught. It is not within the scope of this paper to give proof for the existence of God. However, assuming that He does exist, we will attempt to discuss if His being a wholly good God is inconsistent with His acts and commands, which some believe to be moral atrocities.

The Sovereignty of God

The charges made against the moral character of God and His commands to others can be answered by accepting the fact of God’s sovereign Being. To say that God is sovereign is to say that He is supreme over all beings and things. “The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all” (Psm. 103:19).

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matt.6:13b).

There are divine names which express His sovereignty. He is called “most high God” (Gen. 14:19, 22); “Almighty God” (17:1); and “Lord God Almighty” (Rev. 4:8; 21:22). God is He “who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11). Nothing is too hard for God; He knows all that men do and will reward or punish according to their obedience or disobedience (cf. Jer. 32:17-19). God causes nations to rise and fall and governs the destiny of men and nations (Jer. 18:7-10; Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-31).⁶³ **If one truly believes Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” then nothing else the Bible says about the sovereignty of God should be difficult to accept!**

If God is the Creator of mankind, He has the right to command and do with men any and all things which are consistent with His total character. The Bible depicts God as good (Psm. 25:8); merciful (Psm 130:7); righteous (Gen. 18:25; Psm. 116:5); loving (Deut. 7:13; 1 John 4:8); a God of justice (Psm. 89:14; Isa. 45:21); and He is a holy God (Lev. 11:44-45). God cannot act contrary to His character. The Bible teaches that God wants all men to be saved (John 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:9). Consistent with that will or desire, **God does not show partiality with men as it relates to their salvation or condemnation** (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 10:34-35; Ezek. 33:11; Rev. 22:17). Although God may display great wrath upon nations and individuals at times, He does not assign damnation to those who have not sinned, nor does He cause or force men to sin and be lost. The “whosoever” of John 3:16 and Revelation 22:17, along with the “any” and “all” of Second Peter 3:9 clearly show that God’s sovereign power does not intrude on man’s free will to obey or disobey God, leading to their eternal destiny.

Romans, chapter nine, shows that God does choose

from among men to use certain ones to bring about His will for redeeming mankind. He chose Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (over Esau), and later Moses to fulfill His will. These men were basically good men, obedient to God's will. In the same chapter, Paul showed how God could also use wicked men of a character like Pharaoh to accomplish certain parts of His will. In using men to bring about His will, God does not violate the freewill with which He originally endowed man (cf. Gen. 2:15-17; 3:11-13). God does not make men be good or bad, but He does use the characters of both classes to do His will.

God's sovereign power acquits Him of being morally atrocious in bringing the Flood upon the world to destroy those who were wicked continually (Gen. 6:5-7). His sovereign power also permits Him to decree the destruction of the wicked Canaanite nations whose iniquity had become full (Gen. 15:16; Deut. 7:1-6). These two cases will be the basis of our remaining study. If we can see God's acts or commands here were justified, because He is the sovereign Lord, nothing else which can be presented for criticism by those such as Paine or Allen will present any unique problems.

God's Goodness and the Flood

In Genesis 6:3-5 the Scripture demonstrates the patience of God as He dealt with the corrupt and wicked lives of the ante-deluvian race. These people were not just sinners, they were sinful (full of sin) to the point of that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Comparing these verses with Second Peter 2:5, it seems that God worked with mankind over a century to turn them from their constant sin to righteousness through Noah, "a preacher of righteousness." When they did not respond

God brought the Flood and destroyed all the world, except for Noah, his family of seven, and the animals aboard the ark (Gen. 6-9). This is no fairy tale of the Old Testament. Christ makes reference to this event as historical, comparing it to the certainty of His second coming, saying that His return would come as unexpectedly as the Flood of Noah's day (Matt. 24:38-39; Luke 17:26-27). Unexpectedly does not mean without warning, as we mentioned above. Preachers today frequently mention the return of Christ, but consider how many in the world turn a deaf ear, as they did to Noah's preaching. Did Jesus compare His second coming to a myth or fable? No! If He had, we could not be sure that His return will be a real historical event.

Notice that sin had filled the hearts of every human family except one. What would a good God do? Was there no need for God to move against such evil before it captured the minds of the last righteous family? What of His plan for redeeming mankind? Through whom would this salvation come if there were no holy seed? J. H. Titcomb, in a work long out of print, makes some excellent comments on this vital point. Speaking to critics of God's action in bringing the Flood, he says:

Am I to understand you, however, as saying that a God of love and mercy had absolutely no moral right thus to destroy His own creation on account of its prolonged and inveterate self-corruption, after He had warned it, and had been patient with it through centuries of protracted long-suffering? Are there not stages of moral evil, even in the present day which show themselves absolutely irreclaimable by any remedies known to man; crimes so deep and inveterate that neither mercy nor remedial treatment will stop them? Now you will observe from the narrative [Gen. 6-9] that

this was just the case here. Long-suffering had reached its utmost limit; corruption and rebellion had left only one righteous family. Hence, if permitted longer, the very last remnant of goodness would have perished out of the earth. What! Do you mean to tell me that it would have been consistent with perfect love to allow the last spark of moral goodness to become extinguished? **Are all the resources of love and mercy to be spent upon the wicked and none to be exhibited for the protection of the righteous?** Are there not some periods and cases, even within our own experience, when severe judgments on hardened criminals become conservative of benevolence and kindness toward the innocent? Would any just government allow assassins to go through a country committing murder and rapine upon the population, and corrupting the vitals of society, without feeling a need to interfere on behalf of the virtuous? The cases are exactly analogous. Only, in this instance, the government was God's, and the corruption, instead of being partial, was all but universal. Look at the case fairly in this light gentlemen, and your impeachment of the Divine goodness hopelessly falls to the ground.⁶⁴ [emphasis mine,TJC]

Most people who do not believe in God or the Bible would allow for a nation to exercise judgment against its citizens, or even against another nation which continued to be harmful to all others, but these same people say that they do not believe in God or the Scriptures, partially because a sovereign God took such action against horribly wicked people. Bales points out the inconsistency of such people:

There are those who look for any stick with which they can beat the Bible and faith in God. On the one hand, I have debated atheists who

criticized God for the judgment which He brought on the world in the flood, and the punishment of the inhabitants of Canaan. On the other hand, they have criticized God for not destroying evil like Hitler and thereby preventing them from doing evil to other human beings. If God brings judgment upon a people because they have become evil, they do not like it. If God does not bring judgment on evil people who are giving them trouble, as well as giving others trouble, they do not like it either. They should make up their minds whether they believe there should be any judgment on evil, but let them not arbitrarily switch from Yes to No and back again. Why criticize turning the other cheek and at the same time criticize the principle of strict justice. i.e., an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?⁶⁵

A good God would do precisely what the God of Scripture did! We shall discuss the problem of the children in such so-called atrocities later.

Destruction of the Canaanites by Israel

Basically, the same sort of situation prevailed in the land of Canaan, with the seven pagan nations (Deut. 7:1-7), as prevailed worldwide in Genesis 6-9. Approximately 400 years before Israel went into Canaan by the command of God, the Lord told Abraham, “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:16). The word Amorites sometimes refers to all the inhabitants of Canaan. If these nations had turned to God, their destruction could have been avoided. The book of Jonah is testimony to that fact, since God withheld the promised destruction of Nineveh when they repented (Jonah 3:5-10; Matt. 12:41). All of these facts harmonize to show that God is longsuffering with sinners, but there is an end to His patience (2 Pet. 3:9-10).

The seven nations of Canaan were vile and base in ways that even the Bible's critics would normally condemn. Their religions involved cultic prostitutes and sacrificing babies in the burning arms of their stone or metal idols of Baal, Chemosh and Molech (Jer. 19:5; Lev. 18:21, 24-30; 1 Kings 11:7-8, 33; Jer. 32:35; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6). It was for this wickedness that the Lord drove out or destroyed those nations (Deut. 9:4-6). Israel was severely warned that she would suffer the same fate if she followed the practices of these pagans (Deut. 8:19-20). The same type of principle stated previously by Titcomb is applied by another author to the nations of Canaan:

It is better that the wicked should be destroyed a hundred times over than that they should tempt those who are as yet innocent to join their company. Let us but think what might have been our fate, and the fate of every other nation under heaven, had the sword of the Israelites done its work more sparingly. Even as it was, the small portions of the Canaanites who were left, and the nations around them, so tempted the Israelites by their idolatrous practices that we read of the whole people of God turning away from His service. But, had the heathen lived in the land in equal numbers, and still more had they intermarried largely with the Israelites, how was it possible, humanly speaking, that any sparks of the light of God's truth should have survived to the coming of Christ? . . . The Israelite's sword, in its bloodiest executions, wrought a work of mercy for all the countries of the earth to the very end of the world. They seem of very small importance to us now, those perpetual contests with the Canaanites and the Midianites, and the Ammonites, with which the Books of Joshua and Judges and Samuel are almost filled. . . . But in

these contests, on the fate of one of these nations [Israel] the happiness of the human race depended. The Israelites fought not for themselves only, but for us. It might follow that they should thus be accounted the enemies of mankind—it might be that they were tempted by their very distinctiveness to despise other nations; still they did God’s work,—still they preserved unhurt the seed of eternal life, and were the ministers of blessing to all other nations, even though they themselves failed to enjoy it.⁶⁶

One will note from the history of Israel as related in Scripture that they did not convert the pagan nations about them to God’s way, but they were influenced to leave a strict allegiance to God and mix the wicked ways of paganism with the pure truth God had revealed to them.

One may ask why God used the Israelites to destroy the seven nations, instead of destroying them, for example, as God did the Assyrian army in Second Kings 19 or by some type of natural calamity. H. L. Hastings suggests, “Had the destruction of these nations resulted wholly from natural causes, by slow decay or from sudden calamities, the hand of God would not have been recognized in the punishment, and men would not have learned his hatred of sin and impurity. Hence, that the moral lesson might not be lost upon both Israel and the surrounding nations, such measures were taken as would leave no uncertainty concerning the matter.”⁶⁷ After noting that God used some natural means such as hornets (Exod. 23:28; Deut. 7:20; Josh. 24:12), plus the miracles of the Exodus (Exod. 7-12), Hastings says:

[F]inally the work of destruction was completed by the Israelites themselves. . .that they might

teach the nations how God abhorred impurity, and also thus learn for themselves a lesson of obedience to the divine counsels, and of abstinence from the sins which they were bidden to punish in others.⁶⁸

Should God have prolonged the mercy He showed to these seven nations for over 400 years, when :

with this prolongation of mercy they would soon corrupt all other less degenerate than themselves, until the earth became, as it had become previously before the flood, one seething mass of moral impurity, threatening the final and complete distinction of all goodness. . . . Here I ask again, as I did before, Are all the resources of love and mercy to be spent upon the abandoned, and none to be exhibited for the protection of the virtuous?⁶⁹

This is the other side which critics of God and Scripture do not consider, until they wish to make a point of law to punish those who trouble them with immoral practices. For God to carry on His plan for the redemption of mankind, Israel was preserved until the “fulness of time had come” (Gal. 4:4), when Christ came.

One other matter which critics of the Bible do not often talk about is the fact that God also punished Israel, as He stated He would when she apostatized. Assyria took the northern kingdom of Israel captive in 722 B. C. (2 Kings 17), but He did not allow Assyria to take Jerusalem at that time (cf. 2 Kings 19). However, because Judah did not learn her lesson from the fate of the northern kingdom. God brought Babylon against Judah and Jerusalem (606-587 B. C.) and carried her captive for seventy years (2 Kings 24-25). The Jews were

restored to Jerusalem (cf. books of Nehemiah and Ezra), but later, when the Jews crucified Christ and rejected His work, God destroyed Jerusalem again in A. D. 70 (Matt. 24:1-34). One who does not obey God loses His favor, Jew or Gentile. That lesson is written boldly in Scripture.

Critics of the Bible like Steve Allen and Thomas Paine claim that the Old Testament has set the stage for claims of Holy Wars in the name of Christ (or Allah of the Muslims) throughout history. However, since the beginning of Christ's kingdom there have been no nations who have been given divine revelation from God to carry out carnal warfare. Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world and it not to be established nor expanded by physical force (John 18:36; cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-6; Eph. 6:10-18). This is a favorite ploy of unbelievers to list all the atrocities of so-called Christian groups or religious warring nations and blame God and Christianity for such inhumanities.⁷⁰ Doing so ignores the total context of the Scriptures and falsely discredits God.

Does a Good God Destroy Innocent Children?

The problem of children suffering in normal life through sins against them, natural calamities, and things such as war must be discussed. This is perhaps the most emotional charge made against God's creation and the accounts in the Bible where children were slain with adults. Children suffer partly because we live in a world cursed by sin, in which the environment can bring suffering, and because we are subject to death (Gen. 3:16-19). Children also suffer at the hands of their parents, others, and war.

If we are asked why God did not spare the children of the world's population from the Flood and the destruction of the Canaanite nations, the following points can be made. First, the degree of depravity afflicting the

world at that time was so complete that it would have unquestionably affected the children at an early age. It is not uncommon for child psychologists to note that a child's basic character for life is well established by the time the child is three to five years old:

According to Theodore Lidz of the department of psychiatry of Yale University School of Medicine, "[D]uring no other period of life is the person so transformed both physically and developmentally" as during infancy. Further, "[N]o part of his life experience will be as solidly incorporated in the individual, become so irrevocably a part of him as his infancy." Just as a lack of physical care can lead to ill health or even death, lack of social nurturing produces distortions of emotional development and stunting of intellectual growth.⁷¹

Dr. James Dobson claims even earlier influences:

It is increasingly clear that the origins of human competence are to be found in a critical period of development between eight and eighteen months of age. The child's experiences during these brief months do more to influence future intellectual competence than any time before or after.⁷²

These quotations do not mean that a child is accountable for sin at such a young age, nor that he/she knows how to engage in the wide variety of sinful activities in the world, but that temperament and the ability to learn are being structured for the child to build upon. In addition, children do learn to imitate at a very early age. It is possible even for small children to learn habits and attitudes which incline toward wickedness.

Second, the human child is unique in God's creation.

Possibly no other life forms require so much constant attention for so long a time of development. There was no way that four women on the ark could have cared for the world's population of children for the year of the Flood, supposing that the men cared for all the less dependent animals on board. Even if the full crew of eight persons had given constant attention to the hundreds or thousands of babies and small children, it would have been an impossible task and caused great suffering on the part of the children. Third, and a point especially missed by the Bible's critics, the death of these children was not the worst thing that could happen to them. Since the doctrine of inherited sin is false, as sad as it is, these children died in their innocence and went to heaven before the throne of God. Jesus seems to make that point clearly in Matthew 19:13-15; 18:3-4. While their sinful parents became the objects of God's wrath, the innocent children became recipients of God's eternal mercy. Only the materialist, who believes that physical death ends one's existence, could really complain. One should not try to convict the Bible of bad morals because of the children in these events, since Scripture teaches that children are innocent of sin and spared the eternal death that comes to unrepentant persons who are accountable for their sins.

The same principles hold true regarding the death of the Canaanite children (Deut. 7:1-6; 20:16-18). Although the Hebrew tribes were more numerous than the eight on the ark, they also had their own children to attend to and taking on large numbers of the pagans' children would have been an impossible task. It would also have detracted from Israel's purpose of being a special people, forbidden to mix with those nations in marriage. Israel's bloodlines were to be preserved so that one from Judah, of the family of David, would become the long awaited Messiah, through whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen.

12:1-3; 49:10; 2 Sam. 7:11-17; Acts 3:22-26).

In some cases of Israelite conquest against a nation the children were not destroyed, but those of the seven nations of Deuteronomy 7 were not saved. One may choose to question God regarding His reasons for this, but, as seen above, the physical deaths of these little ones was not as tragic as the unbeliever contends. It was, in a real sense, a salvation from a life of wicked debauchery and condemnation. Does this mean that we should encourage the deaths of children today, to save them from growing up in sin? Of course not. We have no commission from God to do such. There is no special nation status to protect as there was with Israel. God's plan for redemption in Christ has been completed. There is no continuing need for the types of warfare in the development of God's plan through Israel. God has not spoken to any one in the Christian age to engage in physical war in His name, although He is in control of the rise and fall of nations (Jer. 18:7-10).

Conclusion

We have shown that belief in an all-powerful, wholly good God is not a contradiction to the additional fact that evil exists. This world in which we live is the best possible world for the purpose for which God created it, that is, to recognize God's existence and to come to know Him through general (creation) and special (Bible) revelation, and to love and serve Him and our fellowman. The suffering in this world has its place in leading us to fulfill God's plan for us, seeing with eyes of faith a "better country," a heavenly one, not here, but hereafter (Heb. 11:13-16).

God is wholly good in His eternal purpose for man, including His plan to bring into the world the Messiah (Christ) through the nation of Israel. Those wars and

events, which some style as moral atrocities against the character of God, were in fact the acts of a sovereign God in punishing sin and removing it to the degree necessary to maintain the operation of His plan to redeem mankind through Jesus Christ.

If these things are not true, there are no satisfying answers to why evil exists or how God can be good, in view of the existence of evil and the historical events attributed to His will in the Old Testament. Contrary to Steve Allen's charge that Christians need to be freed from their "prison" of thought along these lines, we can be quite comfortable in believing that these matters are reconciled in God's character and eternal purpose for us, as He "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11).

Endnotes

1 "Grieving Mother Questions God," in "Dear Abby" **The Tuscaloosa News** (Tuesday, January 15, 1991), B2.

2 "Holocaust," In **Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary**, 10th Edition (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1993), 553.

3 D. A. Carson, **How Long, O Lord?** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 17.

4 As quoted in Thomas B. Warren, **Sin, Suffering, and God** (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1980), 15. All quotations from Mackie in this manuscript are from this book. Hereafter this book is abbreviated as **SS&G**.

5 Warren, **SS&G**, 16.

6 *Ibid.*, 17.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Lactantius, "A Treatise on the Anger of God," IN: **The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7**, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1996, 1997), 564-565.

9 Eugene Borowitz, **The Mask Jews Wear** (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 79, as quoted in Michael Peterson,

Evil and the Christian God (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), p. 22. This book by Peterson develops the problem of God and evil more from the philosophical point of view, unlike the general tenor of brother Warren's book, **SS&G**. Peterson's book is a valuable read.

10 Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, **Handbook of Christian Apologetics** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 129.

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12 J. S. Feinberg, "Theodicy," IN: **Evangelical Dictionary of Theology**, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1083.

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14 Warren, **SS&G**, 17.

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22 Warren, **SS&G**, 286.

23 Ibid., 294-295.

24 Geisler, **The Roots of Evil**, 18-22.

25 Ibid.

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27 Homer Hailey, **Isaiah** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), p. 380.

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29 Warren, **SSAG**, 301.

30 D. A. Carson, **How Long, O Lord?** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 44.

31 Warren, **SSAG**, 302.

32 *Ibid.*, 299.

33 *Ibid.*, 303, 306-307.

34 *Ibid.*, 308-309.

35 *Ibid.*, 310ff.

36 John Hick, **Evil and the Love of God** (San Francisco: Harper and Row, rev. ed. 1966), 160-168; 281-282.

37 Kerry Duke, **God At A Distance** (Huntsville, AL: Kerry Duke, 1995), 34.

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40 *Ibid.*, 322.

41 *Ibid.*, 326.

42 *Ibid.*, 327-328.

43 *Ibid.*, 328-329.

44 *Ibid.*, 328-329, 353.

45 *Ibid.*, 358.

46 *Ibid.*, 332.

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48 *Ibid.*, 326.

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54 Paine, **The Age of Reason**, 100.

55 Ibid., 103.

56 Ibid., 104.

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58 Allen, **Steve Allen on the Bible, Religion, and Morality**, xvi.

59 Ibid., xxix.

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68 Ibid., 62-63.

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CHAPTER 17

THE OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CONVICTION AND CONVERSION

ROD RUTHERFORD

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION in all the world is, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer one gives to this question, and whether he correctly acts on the answer, will determine where he will be in eternity, whether in Hell with the condemned, or in Heaven with the redeemed.

The answer is clearly given in the New Testament. Five specific steps are required. First, one must hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16) because "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Second, one must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God Who died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead (Mark 16:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Jesus said: "...if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). Third, one must experience godly sorrow for his sins which will lead him to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). Jesus warned His disciples of the consequences of not repenting: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Fourth, one must be led by the Word of God to proclaim his faith before men in an oral, public declaration just as the Ethiopian eunuch did when he confessed, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son

of God” (Acts 8:37). Fifth, one must be buried in water, in the likeness of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). This baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). It is to save one and add him to the body of Christ, which is the church of Christ (1 Pet. 3:21; Acts 2:41,47; 1 Cor. 12:13). Jesus said: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

When one has “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine” (Rom. 6:16-18), he has been “converted” (Matt. 18:3; Acts 3:19). He has been “born again” (John 3:3-5). He has become “a new creature” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). In his obedience, his sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16). By this process, he has been “saved by grace through faith” (Eph. 2:8; Acts 19:5). He has become “a child of God” (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 3:26-27). The one who has obeyed the Lord’s plan of salvation has entered Christ in Whom all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3; Gal. 3:27). His obedience results in his being added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13).

All of the above may be rightly said to be done by the Holy Spirit. The religion of Jesus Christ, which is given in the New Testament, is a Holy Spirit religion. One can be convicted of his sins and converted to the truth of the Gospel only by the Holy Spirit.

Before His death, our Lord promised His apostles:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:7-8).

A sinner is convicted of his sins and is converted to

Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Of this, there can be no doubt or disagreement. The question is: how is it brought about? Is it done directly, or through means? How does the Holy Spirit convict and convert? What does the Bible say (Isa. 8:20; 1 Thess. 5:21)?

The Holy Spirit Is A Person

In order to understand how the Spirit works in conviction and conversion, we must first understand the nature of the Holy Spirit. Some have the mistaken view that the Holy Spirit is an influence or power. However, the Bible teaches the Holy Spirit is a Person. He is one of the Godhead (commonly called “The Trinity” although this term does not appear in the Bible).

The personality of the Spirit of Truth can be seen in the attributes ascribed to Him in the Scriptures. The Spirit speaks (1 Tim. 4:1). He testifies (John 15:26). He also teaches (John 14:26). The Spirit guides (John 16:12-13). Too, the Bible says that the Spirit leads and forbids (Acts 16:6-7). The Spirit searches (1 Cor. 2:10) and has a mind (Rom. 8:27). The Spirit knows (1 Cor. 2:11), loves (Rom. 15:30), and wills (1 Cor. 12:11). Additionally, the Spirit can be grieved (Eph. 4:30) and blasphemed (Matt. 12:31-32). It is possible to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). All of these are attributes of a living Person, not a mere influence!

That the Holy Spirit is Deity and One of the Persons of the Godhead can be seen in His characteristics. The Spirit is eternal (Heb. 9:14). He is also omniscient (1 Cor. 2:10-11), omnipotent (Mic. 3:8), and omnipresent (Psm. 139:7-10). The Spirit of God was active in the creation (Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13). In past ages, He has given power to men to work miracles (Matt. 12:28; 1 Cor. 12:9-11).

The Holy Spirit was present with God the Father, and Christ the Son at Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3:16-17). The

Great Commission includes baptism in (Greek = into) “the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). The three Persons possessing the Divine Nature are linked together in Paul’s doxology at the close of the Second Corinthian letter (2 Cor. 13:14).

Calvinism Teaches A Direct Operation

John Calvin, sixteenth century Protestant reformer of Geneva, Switzerland, set forth his theology in a multi-volume work entitled *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin borrowed heavily from Augustine, philosopher and theologian of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, who is considered one of the “fathers” of the Roman Catholic Church. Calvin’s system has had a tremendous influence on present day Protestant thought. Many different denominations follow all, or part, of his doctrine.

In 1618, a church council convened by the Synod of Dort in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands formulated Calvin’s system into five basic points. These five points are commonly set forth by Calvinists in the form of an acrostic which spells “T-U-L-I-P.” The five points are:

T otal Hereditary Depravity
U nconditional Election
L imited Atonement
I rresistible Grace
P erseverance of the Saints¹

The doctrine of Total Hereditary Depravity is the mistaken belief that the entire human race inherits Adam’s sin. Thus, little babies who do not know the difference between right and wrong, and have never done anything of moral consequence in their short lives, are nevertheless sinners and were born that way. Further,

Calvinists believe that the inherited fallen nature of man is so depraved that man is incapable of doing anything to save himself from his depraved moral state. God's Word does not teach such a diabolical doctrine! Man has free will given to him by his Creator (Josh. 24:14-15). Sin, by definition, is not something one inherits or receives, but what he does (1 John 3:4). The Bible also teaches very clearly that one is not responsible for the sins of his fathers, but for his own sins:

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him (Ezek. 18:20).

Unconditional Election says that before the foundation of the world God foreknew who would be born. He predestined some individuals to be saved (elected to salvation) and others to be lost. This was purely arbitrary on the part of God. Whatever one does, and what kind of character he has, makes absolutely no difference, say the Calvinists. The Bible, however, does not teach this cruel Calvinistic doctrine!

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a "whosoever" Gospel. "Whosoever will may come!" The Gospel is for the whole world, every nation, and every creature (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15). God wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). He is not "willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

The doctrine of Limited Atonement denies that Christ died for all men. According to those who hold this view, Christ died only for the elect, those predestined and foreordained to salvation by God before the foundation of the world. God's Word plainly refutes this false doctrine. The Great Commission commands that the Gospel be preached to **every** creature (Mark 16:15). This strongly implies that Christ died so that every person could be saved, if he chooses to do so. The inspired author of the book of Hebrews wrote:

But we see Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for **every** man (Heb. 2:9).

The fourth point of Calvinism, irresistible grace, is especially pertinent to our study of the work of the Holy Spirit in conviction and conversion. This doctrine says that if an individual is one of the elect for whom Christ made atonement, he will be saved. However, since he is so depraved that he can make no moral decision, God must take the initiative. He does this by sending the Holy Spirit into the heart of the non-believing, depraved, albeit, elect soul. The Spirit will miraculously impart faith to the hard heart, and this faith will then respond to God's grace. Thus, the sinner is saved by grace through faith and, in the words of brother Rubel Shelly, formerly a faithful preacher of the Gospel, "We do not contribute one whit to our salvation."² The fallacy of this point is the theme of this lecture and will be amply refuted in due course.

The fifth and final point of Calvinism is the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. Expressed another way, it is the old doctrine of "once saved, always saved." If an

individual is one of the elect for whom Christ died, and into whose heart faith has been imparted by a direct, miraculous working of the Holy Spirit, then it would follow logically that such an individual could not fall away from God's grace so as to be eternally lost. Literally hundreds of verses in the Bible refute this popular false doctrine.

In First Corinthians, chapter 10, Paul pointed to several Old Testament examples of apostasy among God's people. In verse 12, he issued a strong warning for all ages: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). He also warned the Galatian Christians who were adding Old Testament practices to the Gospel of Christ: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; **ye are fallen from grace**" (Gal. 5:4).

How The Spirit Convicts And Converts

In order to know how the Holy Spirit works in convicting and converting sinners, one must first understand the relationship between the Spirit and the Word of God. The Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4). The Word (Gospel) is His **instrument** to bring about change in the human heart. The Word of God is "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17). A swordsman does not fight his enemy with his bare hands. He uses an instrument -- his sword. We may say, "The soldier killed his enemy," when, in reality, the sword cut off the head of the enemy. However, it was the soldier who wielded the sword and directed it to the enemy's vital parts with sufficient force to cause the enemy's death. Thus, the soldier killed the enemy **by means of the sword!** This is an exact parallel with the way the Holy Spirit brings souls to salvation. The actual impact on the heart of the sinner is made by the teaching of the Word of God, but the Word was given by the Holy Spirit:

The Word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

The New Birth

We often hear the term “born again Christian.” This is redundant! There is no such thing as a Christian who has not been born again! One might as well speak of a “born human” as to speak of a “born again Christian.” If one has been truly born again, he is a Christian. If he has not, he is not a Christian in any Biblical sense of the word!

The requirement of the new birth to enter the kingdom was clearly stated by Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1-12). The ruler of the Jews had a question in mind: “How can one enter the kingdom which Jesus preached?” Our Lord went to the heart of the matter by addressing the question in Nicodemus’ heart. He said: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Nicodemus, like so many of us today, could think only in terms of the flesh. He assumed that Jesus was speaking of a fleshly birth. This was the way he had become a part of the nation of Israel. Jesus explained: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

There are two things necessary for a birth to take place. First, there must be a begetting, which is done by the father. Second, there must be a delivery, which is done by the mother. In the new birth, one is begotten by the Spirit and brought forth of water.

Please keep in mind that the Holy Spirit does not operate directly on the heart of man, but works through His instrument, the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). That the

Word of truth, the Gospel of salvation, is the means by which the Holy Spirit begets faith in the heart of man can clearly be seen in the following passages:

Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures (Jas. 1:18).

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever (1 Pet. 1:22-23).

Paul penned: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Jesus said: “... preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15-16). When one hears and accepts the Word of God, faith is begotten in his heart by the Holy Spirit.

One is brought forth from the water when he is baptized. Baptism is a likeness of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the reason it is an immersion in water and a bringing forth out of the water (See Rom. 6:3-4; Acts 8:36-38). Neither sprinkling nor pouring portrays a death, burial and resurrection, but immersion does! We are “saved by water” (1 Pet. 3:21) in the sense that in baptism, God washes away our sins by the blood of Christ (Matt. 26:28; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rev. 1:5).

Examples Of Conversion

God has given His requirements which must be met in order for sinners to receive salvation. These conditions

are clearly set forth in the Great Commission. The Gospel must be preached. Those who hear must believe, repent, and be baptized. This results in the gift of salvation (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47). In addition, the book of Acts, which has been called “the book of conversions,” contains several examples of different individuals, under various circumstances, who heard the Gospel from the lips of inspired men and obeyed in order to be saved. Because it is so very crucial that sinners understand exactly what God requires, He has given all these examples so that there can be no mistake made by the sincere seeker after salvation.

When the first Pentecost day dawned following the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of our Lord, the apostles were together in Jerusalem just as Jesus had commanded (Acts 1:4). They were baptized in the Holy Spirit just as He had promised them (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4). They were now empowered to act as His ambassadors in declaring the terms of pardon and in establishing His kingdom on the earth (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; 2 Cor. 5:20).

Peter **preached the Gospel** to the assembled multitude on that momentous occasion (Acts 2:14-36). When they **heard the Word**, they were “pricked in their hearts” (convicted) and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). The hearers had faith begotten in their hearts by the Holy Spirit through His inspired Word which Peter preached. In response to their question, they were told by God’s inspired spokesman to “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. . . .” (Acts 2:38). “Then they that **gladly received his Word** were baptized” (Acts 2:41). When they were baptized, they were born of the water. Therefore, the three thousand who were converted

on Pentecost day were “born of water and the Spirit” when they **heard** the Gospel, believed it, repented of their sins, and were baptized for the remission of sins. The terms of the Great Commission were complied with and salvation was the result!

In every one of the examples of conversion in Acts, one will find that the Holy Spirit worked through the Word in convicting and converting sinners. After Pentecost, many others were added to the church in Jerusalem. “Howbeit many of them which **heard the Word** believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:4). After the church at Jerusalem was scattered by persecution, “... they that were scattered abroad went everywhere **preaching the Word**” (Acts 8:4).

One of those who was forced to flee was Philip, the evangelist. “...Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and **preached Christ** to them” (Acts 8:5). Philip confirmed the preaching of the Word of God by miraculous signs of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:6-7; Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:2-3). “But when they believed Philip **preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

Philip was told by an angel to go “toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza” (Acts 8:26-38). When Philip obeyed, he met a man from Ethiopia who was riding in a chariot reading from the Word of God. The Holy Spirit told Philip to “Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.” This was the only **direct** part the Spirit played in this man’s salvation. He spoke, not to the sinner who needed to be converted, but to the preacher! Philip was invited into the chariot by the Eunuch. The Eunuch was reading from Isaiah a prophecy of the death of Christ for our sins (Isa. 53). “Then Philip **opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached** unto him **Jesus**.” The Eunuch made the good

confession, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." He was then baptized by Philip and was thereby born of the water and of the Spirit! The Holy Spirit was responsible for the conviction and conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch by means of the message He had inspired and which Philip preached.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is recorded three times in Acts. It is found in chapters 9, 22, and 26. The Lord appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. This was to qualify Saul to be an apostle for an apostle had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Lord (Acts 22:15; 1:22). However, in order to be saved Saul had to act upon the knowledge he had of the Gospel of Christ, which was confirmed for him by the Lord's appearance to him. Despite the fact that the Lord had appeared to him, he still had to obey the baptism of the Great Commission so he was told to "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). When he did this, he was "born again of water and the Spirit." Even though he was chosen to be an apostle, Saul had to be saved from his sins in the same that every person is saved.

The conversion of Cornelius and his household was unique also. Cornelius was the first Gentile convert to Christ after Pentecost. His case would be a test case. No doubt this was the reason the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household in the same way the apostles had been baptized in the Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 11:17).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was not to save them, but it was to prove to the Jews that God had granted unto the Gentiles also "repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Cornelius and his household were convicted by the Spirit when Peter told them "words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved" (Acts 11:14; 10:34-43). These inspired words were obeyed for Peter "...commanded them to be

baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48).

Two accounts of conversion are recorded in Acts 16. Paul and Silas were in Philippi preaching the Gospel. Their first convert was Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15). Lydia was a worshiper of the true God after the manner of the Jewish law. Lydia “heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14). Lydia is often used by Calvinists as a case of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion. However, no mention is made of the Holy Spirit operating directly. Lydia’s heart was opened, made receptive to the Gospel, by the preaching of Paul. She then “attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul.” This means she obeyed the Gospel which she heard. That this is the case is plainly seen in verse 15 which tells us she was baptized. Lydia was born of water when she was baptized. She was born of the Spirit when she heard and attended unto the things that were preached.

The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas the great question: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Their reply was: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:30-34). Since “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17), they “spake unto him the Word of the Lord, and to all that were in the house.” As a result of the preaching of the Word, the jailer and his household were taken the same hour of the night “. . . and was baptized, he and all his straightway.” It was only when this was done that it was said that he “rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”

The operation of the Spirit in the conversion of the Corinthians is succinctly summed up by Luke in Acts 18:8 which says “. . . and many of the Corinthians **hearing, believed, and were baptized.**” The Spirit begat faith in their hearts through the Word preached. They heard

and believed and were baptized in response to it.

The Ephesians were convicted of the truth by the preaching of Paul and were converted when they “were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 19:1-5; Eph.1:13; 2:8). Again, it was a case of the Holy Spirit acting through the Word. This resulted in those who received the Word being baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Inconsistencies Of Calvinism

If sinners are converted by a **direct** operation of the Holy Spirit, separate and apart from the Word of God and the sinner’s obedience to it, these conclusions follow: {1} God is a respecter of persons, for if He arbitrarily saves one and rejects another, He is showing partiality, and this is contrary to His own revealed Word (Acts 10:34-35; Jas. 2:9). {2} God is responsible for those who are lost (2 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). {3} Man is a mere automaton with no power to choose for himself (Josh. 24:15).{4} The Great Commission is unnecessary, for why should we go into all the world with the Gospel when God has already predestined the specific individuals who are going to be saved and will send His Spirit into their hearts to make it possible for them to believe (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16)? {5} The Gospel of Christ is robbed of its power for salvation for it cannot save “everyone” who believes. It is only for the “elect” (Rom. 1:16).

Any doctrine which implies false doctrine (s) is itself a false doctrine! The direct operation of the Holy Spirit in convicting and converting sinners to Jesus Christ is a false doctrine which gives rise to many other false doctrines!

Mourner’s Bench Religion

The doctrine of the direct operation of the Spirit in conviction and conversion led to the “mourner’s bench”

system of religion. If the Holy Spirit works directly in the human heart to impart faith, then those who desire to be saved must kneel in prayer to plead with God to send His Spirit to save them. This Calvinistic concept inspired Fanny J. Crosby's popular song, "Pass Me Not:"

Pass me not, O gentle Savior; Hear my humble
cry; While on others thou art calling, Do not pass
me by.³

We do not need to plead with our loving Heavenly Father to save us. He has freely and graciously given His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for our sins (Rom. 5:6-8). He desires our salvation above all else (1 Tim. 2:4). All we have to do is receive the teaching of His Holy Spirit through the inspired Word. This Word tells us to believe in Jesus Christ, His Son; repent of all our sins; confess Christ's precious name before men; and be immersed for the forgiveness of our sins. We will then be in Christ where all spiritual blessings are (Eph. 1:3; Gal. 3:26-27). What about you, reader? Have you been born again? Why not accept His grace today?

Endnotes

1 Seaton, W. J. **The Five Points of Calvinism**, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970, p. 4.

2 Shelly, Rubel, "Arbeit Macht Frei," in **Love Lines**, bulletin of the Woodmont Hills Family of God, Nashville, TN Oct. 31, 1990.

3 Crosby, Fanny J. "Pass Me Not" in **Great Songs of the Church**, No. 2, (Chicago, Great Songs Press, 1966), number 189.

CHAPTER 18

THE OPERATION OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LIFE
OF A CHRISTIAN

DAVID P. BROWN

Introduction

AMONG DENOMINATIONAL CHURCHES a number of various contradictory views of the Holy Spirit's work exists. Most of these erroneous concepts place the Word of God secondary and subsidiary to some kind of "better felt than told" subjective emotional experience. Over the years within the church of Christ there have been and are differing views of the work of the Holy Spirit. Some of these doctrines are no different from their denominational sectarian counterparts. Let us notice some of these false views concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the church today.

"No Earthly Sense"

Terry Rush, preacher for the Memorial Drive Church of Christ, Tulsa, Oklahoma wrote a book entitled, *The Holy Spirit Makes No Earthly Sense*. Among other things he declared that "Spirit and law don't mix." Likewise he said, "With him, we gain strength — invisible, direct strength to do kingdom work." Furthermore, he penned, "Christians are led by the Spirit conclusively in that we are able to see secret signals." Rush also wrote, "It is my observation

that without the Holy Spirit the Bible only makes no earthly sense. I am thoroughly persuaded that the scriptures become nothing more than a mere book of 'blah' if we are not Spirit led." He emphatically declared that it is "Law versus Spirit." Rush concludes that "Spirit and law don't mix." Likewise, he said, "God and sin do not coexist; nor do Spirit and law."

Rush's comments are in direct contradiction to the Word of God. They are nothing less than blasphemous. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). Paul also wrote, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Moreover, Paul referred to the "law of faith" (Rom. 3:27), the "law of love" (Rom. 13:10), the "law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25), and the "royal law" (Jas. 2:28). When writing such stuff as Rush set out in his book, he evidenced a gross ignorance of the Bible, no respect for its authority, and a perverted view of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. The Holy Spirit operates through a rule of action fitted to man as God created him. (More will be said about this thought later in this chapter.)

Rubel on the Spirit

Rubel Shelly wrote a bulletin article entitled "*Living by the Spirit.*" It is quoted in its entirety below:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph. 3:16:17a).

Since the new birth is a single event involving two elements (i.e., water and Spirit), it is reasonable that one should expect the Holy Spirit to be involved in the maturing of a believer

(John 3:5; cf. Tit. 3:5). The “gift of the Holy Spirit” given to each believer at his or her baptism (Acts 2:38) is not a miraculous empowerment given occasional believers to work signs and wonders but the common empowerment given all believers for the sake of our struggle against the dark spiritual forces arrayed against us.

The daily grace that God supplies Christians does not come from intellect and willpower. It comes instead from an internal dynamic greater than anything in us by virtue of our human nature. The Spirit of God enables one to live a holy life that is beyond him in the power of the flesh.

Paul’s contrast between flesh (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*) in Romans is not a contrast between the outer, visible man and the inner, invisible person. It is instead a contrast between weakened, sinful human nature on the one hand and empowered, redeemed human nature on the other. If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Rom. 8:13-14).

Sanctification is ultimately a cooperative work between a yielded human spirit and the transforming Spirit of God. Yet the primary force in the process is the divine rather than human spirit, and the focus for believers must be on *being* rather than *doing* lest our doctrine of sanctification be reduced to a form of works righteousness within a legalistic system. Thus Paul can speak of the “acts of the flesh” and the *fruit of the Spirit* in Galatians 5. At the end of the process, God alone deserves glory for the

transformation that has taken place.

To the degree that we live *Christian* lives, it must be done in the power of the Holy Spirit and not through our pitiful struggles. Remembering that just might help at some critical moments along the journey.

It is obvious that Shelly is teaching that there must be a direct empowerment by the Holy Spirit on the inward man. Why is this the case? Because man's nature is corrupt. Shelly's view is as Calvinistic as Campbell's opponent, N. L. Rice. Shelly declared, "The Spirit of God enables one to live a holy life that is beyond him in the power of the flesh." This, he says is the case, because of our "sinful human nature." Because, of the implications of his "sinful human nature"(meaning that man is not inclined to any good thing). Shelly does not believe that the Holy Spirit operates on the Christian only through means. He believes in naked divine Spirit on naked human spirit. He denies the Spirit working through a rule of law or action fitted to the constitution of the human mind. He is declaring that you cannot change your life by simply from the heart submitting to the gospel and living according to the teaching of the New Testament. Walking in the light of divine truth and covered by the blood of the Lamb is insufficient to take care of a Christian's salvation needs. Please note that I am not speaking of God's providential action.

"He Touched Me"

In their February 1, 1998, church bulletin, page 2, the North Madison Church of Christ, Madisonville, Texas, printed the following article by her "Music/Youth and Education" person, Dale Underwood. Please consider what he wrote. The entire unedited article is herein reproduced.

Giving Glory to God.....

It is at once an exhilarating and humbling reminder of His power when God works through one of His servants. Your comments Sunday were gratifying and heartening, because I know that you understood and applied the message God allowed me to preach. It has made me ponder how best to give God the glory.

You see, I fully believe that the Spirit gave me the subject of "Drawing Water From Empty Wells." I had not planned on my thoughts going in that direction, nor had I intended in addressing such issues. Yet, as I prayed for God's blessing and leading, the subject came to and then would not leave my mind. So, again.....It is at once exhilarating to watch as God works. Yet, humbling, because you were moved as a family...but not by me.

In the past, I didn't think this way, but I do now. While I may desire and work toward mutual knowledge and understanding, I will not expend my energy on getting others to agree with me. If there are those who feel differently on issues such as these as Paul put it, "God will make it clear to that person." A spirit of dissension is easily seen by its fruits, just as a spirit of love and submission is easily seen by the fruit it bears. May we ever know (and not be afraid to feel) God's anointing in our worship.

Love,
Dale

When members of the Lord's church begin to think that the Holy Spirit is the source of their thoughts, there is no end to the fantastic claims they will make.

Denominational preachers in general and so-called Pentecostals in particular have long declared that God has anointed them with His Spirit and thereby given them their sermons and directly guided them in other ways. However, they know nothing about “rightly dividing” “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (2 Tim. 2:15; Eph. 6:17).

Furthermore, they have little or no respect for the authority of God’s word or how to ascertain it (Col.3:17). One would think that if the Holy Spirit were going to directly manipulate Underwood’s mind he would stop him from going beyond the things that are written (1 Cor. 4:6, ASV, 1901). However, Underwood and others of his stripe are routinely involved in fellowshipping denominational churches as well as all manner of other error.

From the following quotation Underwood reveals that he has joined the ranks of the Biblically deluded.

You see, I fully believe that the Spirit gave me the subject of ‘Drawing Water From Empty Wells.’ I had not planned on my thoughts going in that direction, nor had I intended in addressing such issues. Yet, as I prayed for God’s blessing and leading, the subject came to and then would not leave my mind.

There is not a denominational pastor from TBN (Trinity Broadcasting Network) to Oral Roberts University that has not made such a claim. Whatever “ghost” got after Underwood, it is not difficult to determine that it was not holy.

The Spirit and the Church in General

Over the years the predominant views in the Lord’s church pertaining to the work of the Holy Spirit have anchored His work to the Word of God. By anchored to

the Word, I mean that brethren in general have not claimed for the work of the Holy Spirit anything that would contradict the authority and teaching of the Word of God (Col. 3:17; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16- 17). In general the same is true regarding what brethren have taught on the work of the Holy Spirit on sinner and saint alike.

I do not know of any brother who is anchored in the fundamentals of New Testament Christianity who does not believe that Deity has a special disposition toward and relationship with His children (faithful members of the church of Christ). God forgave such persons' sins when they obeyed the gospel (Rom. 1:16; 6:3, 4, 17, 18; Col. 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21). The Lord added them (the saved) to His church, which is another way of saying they were baptized into Christ or they were born of water and the Spirit (Acts 2:47; Gal. 3:27; John 3:3- 5). By the Blood of Christ they have been redeemed, justified, sanctified, and reconciled to God (1 Pet. 1:18- 19; Rom. 8:30; Eph. 5:26; 2:16). They are a people for His own possession (Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). They are the "fulness" of Christ that "fillet all in all" (Eph. 1:23). They are heaven bound (Rom. 8:24). Paul declared "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Notice that Paul did not say some, but "all spiritual blessings" are located "in Christ." In the light of these and other Scriptures surely no one will say that God's children are not special to Him.

It is the Holy Spirit (the third person of the Godhead) who is Deity's agent to transform alien sinners into Christians. Moreover, the same Spirit influences and helps Christians to become more like Christ. Thus, we are brought directly to the subject of our study in this chapter—"The Operation of the Spirit in the Life of a Christian."

Let us begin our study with a definition. "Operate"

is defined, “to perform a function: exert power or influence.” Hence, our study pertains to the Holy Spirit’s performance of functions or exerting of His power or influence in the lives of Christians. With these introductory thoughts before us let us continue our study.

The Influence Of The Sword Of The Spirit In The Lives Of Christians (Eph. 6:17)

The Word of God is the instrument or medium of God’s agent (the Holy Spirit) to effect moral and spiritual changes in mankind (Luke 8:11). The question is how does He do it? Regarding this matter Alexander Campbell declared:

That the human mind has a specific and well-defined constitution, is as evident, as that the body has a peculiar organization; or that the universe itself has one grand code of laws, which govern it. Our intellectual and moral constitution, as well as our physical, has its peculiar powers and capacities—not one of which is violated on the part of our Creator, in his remedial administration, any more than are our sensitive and animal faculties destroyed or violated by the physician, who rationally and benevolently aims at our restoration to health from some physical malady. No new faculties are imparted—no old faculty destroyed. They are neither more nor less in number; they are neither better nor worse in kind. Paul the apostle, and Saul of Tarsus, are the same person, so far as all the animal, intellectual and moral powers are concerned. His mental and physical temperament were just the same after, as before he became a Christian. The Spirit of God, in effecting this great change, does not violate, metamorphose, or annihilate any power of faculty of the man, in making the

saint. He merely receives new ideas, and new impressions, and undergoes a great moral, or spiritual change—so that he becomes alive wherein he was dead, and dead wherein he was formerly alive.

In nature and in grace, God operates not without his Word. *He never has wrought without means.* He has, so far as earth's annals reach, and as the rolls of eternity have been opened to our view, never done any thing without an instrumentality. The naked Spirit of God never has operated upon the naked spirit of man, so far as all science, all revelation teach. Abstract spiritual operations is a pure metaphysical dream. There is nothing to favor such a conceit in nature, providence or grace. God broke the awful stillness of eternity with his own creative voice. He SPOKE, *before any thing was done.* Speech, or language, or a word, is the original and sublime instrumentality of all divine operations. God said, LET THERE BE LIGHT, and light was born. Does not the Bible say, "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed *by the Word of God,*" so that the things that were made, were not made of things that did formerly exist. They were made out of the Word of God. All things having been created by the Word of God. Most evident it is, that his Word is the *all creative instrument.* Without it was not any thing made that now exists. Of course, then, if persons were to be created anew in Christ Jesus, without the Word of God, it would be a perfect anomaly, something wholly new in the history of the universe. If God operated upon absolute nonentity, and then upon inert matter, by his Word, and if his Spirit thus brooded on

old chaos, what tongue of man can prove that in the new creation, he regenerates, renews, re-creates and sanctifies man without his Word!! It never can be done, Mr. President. It is not only out of the power of Mr. Rice, but every other living man to show, that God moves at all in the affairs of redemption, but through his Word. God's Spirit and Word operated conjointly on ancient chaos, and they still operate together on the chaos of the human heart in its sins. Read Psm. 29:3-9; 33:6-9.

What scriptural reason is there to believe that the Holy Spirit does not use the same means to grow a Christian as He does in the begetting and birth of one? As James Zachary said:

The Holy Spirit not only bears witness with our spirit, proving us to be children of God, but the Spirit also bears witness with our spirit, showing whether or not we are living the true Christian life. (Matt. 4:4; 7:20; John 8:1; Rom. 8:14). We have an infallible guide. Each one can know for himself—*can have the witness or testimony within himself*—as to whether or not he is being led by the divine counsel of the Holy Spirit, as he speaks to us through his revelation. In religion we should not be anything, do or teach anything, except as the Holy Spirit directs. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14).

A Rule of Action

It should be understood by all, that **law is a rule of action**. God's law, therefore, is a spiritual rule of action for men. It is the “perfect law of liberty” that convicts and converts men to Christ. It is that same law by which

Christians must continue to live for Christ (Jas. 1:25). There is nothing in the New Testament that teaches a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the inward man to infuse in him godliness or the Christian disposition of mind and character. Paul wrote, “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he none of his” (Rom. 8:9). How does one have the Spirit of Christ?

The Holy Spirit indwells through a manner or mode of indwelling—a rule of action that will not by-pass the way God organized man to function. Paul wrote to the Philippians, saying: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). The apostle then instructed the Philippians in humility and meekness as it characterized Christ (vss.6-9). In verses 12 and 13, Paul, wrote, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” The Spirit of Christ is in us as the mind of Christ is in us. The mind of Christ is in us through the instrumentality of the Word of God. Thereby, God works in us “to will and do his good pleasure.”

The Apostle Paul and the Spirit

There is no one alive today who had the Spirit’s power and association such as the apostle Paul and the other apostles did. Yet, Paul declared that it was his personal responsibility and will power that kept him within the boundaries of God’s rule of action pertaining to his sanctification. He wrote, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27). Paul did not say that he had a direct working of the

Holy Spirit within his inward man to “keep under” his body. If anyone could have declared such a work of the Holy Spirit Paul could have. However, he did not say that. He said “*I*” keep under “*my body*.” He did not say that the Holy Spirit directly brings “my body” “into subjection,” but “*I*... bring it into subjection.” The question is, in “subjection” to what? The answer: God’s rule of action regarding sanctification. Thus, the mind of Christ (the Spirit of Christ) is within the child of God as the Word of God that pertains to Christian living guides the life of the Christian.

Indeed, “the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:10). That is simply another way of saying that the Holy Spirit indwells and operates in the Christian through righteousness, i. e. “the commandments of God” (Psm. 119:172). The Spirit indwells the Christian through a law or rule of action, which respects the constitution of the mind (inward man) of a person. Therefore, the life offered to man by the Spirit is through the same rule of action that is found in the instructive powers of the Word of God. Via that avenue the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians.

Therefore, it is through the Spirit (by His rule or law of action in the New Testament) that we put to death “the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13). Through that same avenue, or rule of action (the New Testament), we (sons of God) “are led by the Spirit of God” (Rom. 8:14). Indeed, we have received the Spirit of sonship. We received it in exactly the same manner (rule or law of action) that we received the mind of Christ, the Word of God. Thereby, and only thereby, does the Spirit bear “witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”

When a person’s spirit (mind or inward man) reviews his conduct in the light of the Holy Spirit’s revelation, he receives the testimony of the mind of Christ (the will of

Christ, the gospel). Because of the constitution of his spirit he is able to adjust his life to fit the truth of the gospel. On the other hand, if one thereby sees that his conduct in harmony with the Spirit's revelation, he may continue down the pathway of righteousness.

What is The Fruit Of The Spirit Of Galatians 5:22- 23?

The Word of God is the Word of the Spirit. Why is this the case? Because "the Word" is the Word of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). The Word of God is God's seed and it has life within itself (Luke 8:11). The Spirit's Words are, therefore, spiritual Words. They are signs of spiritual ideas or vehicles of God's thoughts. Hence, the Hebrews writer declared of them:

For the word of God is quick (alive, **ASV—1901**), and powerful (active, **ASV—1901**), and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

To live on the plan or level of the spirit (inward man) and not on the level of the flesh (outward man) we must be led, guided, and directed by the Spirit, through the instrumentality of His sword (Eph. 6:17). Jesus declared: "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John 6:63). Indeed the Holy Spirit does act upon the spirit (inward man) of the saint for the purpose of causing him to live on the level of his inward man (his spirit). However, it is not something done without a Christian's cooperation; namely, he must do what is necessary to learn the Word and live it. Nevertheless, it is the Holy Spirit who makes the person in the likeness of Christ, but he

does it through His instrument, God's Word. As David declared, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psm. 119:11).

Most people believe that "the fruit of the Spirit" is the product in the life of a Christian that is produced by the Holy Spirit. Some believe that such fruit cannot be produced by the Holy Spirit except that the essence of Deity in the person of the Holy Spirit is directly attached to the substance of the spirit (inward man) of the Christian. Is it possible that we have read into the text of Galatians five what has not been there? Consider what Z. T. Sweeny said regarding "the fruit of the Spirit":

The Fruits of the Spirit. I have not treated this passage hitherto (in his book *The Spirit and the Word*—D.P.B), because I do not understand the apostle to be referring to the Holy Spirit, but to man's spirit. In this fifth chapter of Galatians the apostle divides man into two domains, one of the flesh and another of the spirit. He says: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: for these are contrary the one to the other: that ye *may not do the things that ye would*" (Gal. 5:17). It is impossible to imagine "the flesh" preventing the Holy Spirit from doing "the things he would." It is also impossible to conceive that the Holy Spirit lusting against man's flesh. But we all recognize that there is a terrible conflict between man's flesh and *his spirit*. These are contrary one to the other and lust against each other. When man's flesh triumphs over his spirit, certain works are inevitable which Paul enumerates. When the Spirit (in man) dominates the flesh, then certain "fruits of the Spirit" appear. They are the fruits of man's spiritual nature triumphing over his fleshly nature. The same

contrast is set forth in Galatians, chapter 6, where it speaks of sowing to the flesh and to the Spirit. How can any man sow to the Holy Spirit? Paul describes the same conflict in the seventh chapter Romans. I think that the spirit (of man) can be aided by the Holy Spirit in its battle against the flesh, but the “fruits” mentioned are of man’s spirit and not the Holy Spirit.

While Homer Hailey believes in a direct personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian he has this to say regarding the spirit and the flesh in Galatians chapter five, as well as in Romans chapter eight:

Furthermore, I believe that the conflict between the spirit and the flesh in Rom. 8:1-17 and Gal. 5:16-26, is not between the Holy Spirit and my flesh, but between my flesh and my spirit. And, except where the apostle specially designated the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ or the Holy Spirit, “spirit” should be spelled with a small “s.” Capitalizing the S in “spirit” expressed the translators’ idea, not Paul’s.

To live on the level of the spirit is not to allow the lusts of the flesh to dominate one. How does this happen? By a Christian living according the Words of the Holy Spirit regarding those things God enjoins on one who is a Christian.

What is the difference in bearing the fruit of the spirit and putting to death the old man of sin and putting on the new man of righteousness (Col. 3:1-14)? Are these terms not saying the same thing in different ways? How is there any difference in bearing the fruit of the spirit (living on the plane of the unseen, the metaphysical) and living the life of love for God, for man, and for self (Matt. 22:37-40)?

Is it possible for a Baptist to read the Bible, believing it to be the Word of God? The answer is yes. Is it possible for a Baptist (thinking that he is a Christian) to read what the Spirit said regarding the fruit of the spirit (inward man) and conclude that he should bear out in his life love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance? Again, the answer is yes. Is it possible for a Baptist actually develop love, joy, peace and all the rest of the component parts of the fruit of the spirit? Yes he could, because he can read, understand, and do those things that are listed and that comprise the fruit of the Spirit. Well, then that must mean that the Spirit can work in the non-Christian to accomplish the same thing he can in the Christian. If one accepts the personal indwelling and direct enabling power of the Holy Spirit working only in the Christian as the only way such things can be done, such would be the case.

However, I have already pointed out that while the Spirit uses the same rule of action to convict, convert, and sanctify, the principles of the Gospel reserved for the saved in Christ are not the same principles God has for the alien sinner. While the Baptist (thinking himself to be a Christian) could mold his life according to the component parts of the fruit of the spirit it would accomplish nothing, because he is yet in his sins and out side of Christ. He is not good as God in His word defines good (Matt. 7:18- 19). If you please, he is not in Christ. Therefore, none of his efforts are noted and accepted by God. However, such does not mean that he is automatically void of all vestiges of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and faith.

Anything that a non-Christian is believing and doing that is in harmony with the New Testament before he becomes a Christian he does not have to give up when he learns and obeys the truth. He keeps on practicing it with

a better understanding than he had before he was taught the complete gospel. What is the difference? The difference is not what the Baptist believed and did in exercising himself according to Gal. 5:22, it is the fact that having obeyed the gospel his right actions are now recognized and acceptable to God.

Is it possible for a lost religious person who believes that he must live according to the New Testament to cease any and all of the works of the flesh without being a Christian (Gal. 5:19-21). The answer is yes. If such a person can labor to cease such sins, then what is prevent that same person from doing what the Bible teaches regarding developing the fruit of the spirit. Will it do the lost person any good (as pertains to his salvation) as far as God is concerned. The answer is an emphatic, no. Why? Because he is yet dead in his sins and not a child of God. He is not in Christ. He has not benefits of the blood of Christ. However, if he is taught the truth regarding how to become a Christian, becomes a Christian by obeying the gospel, what must he alter in his efforts to mold his life regarding the matters set out in Gal.5:19-25? In complying with the plan of salvation, must he repent of the things in his life that were there because he had been living like the Bible said?

What about the person who genuinely concludes after several years that he or she was not baptized for the scriptural reason? Yet, this person has been studying and putting into practice those things necessary to abiding by Gal.5:19-25? Just how much does that person have to turn from (repent of) when he or she is baptized for the right reason? This provides no problem to anyone, unless you are bound to the view that says the Holy Spirit personally comes to actually indwell you at the moment you become a Christian for the purpose of enabling you to produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, such a

view means that you cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit unless the essence of Deity in the person of the Holy Spirit is dwelling in you to help the word infuse spirituality and morality in you. A person may guide his life according to what the Bible teaches regarding Christian living, but no matter how close he practices the principles of Christian living he will lose his soul because he is yet in his sins (Matt. 7:17-20).

Faith from the Spirit

Once a person is converted to Christ there is no scriptural reason to believe that the Christian's faith is not sustained and strengthened through and by the same means whereby the Holy Spirit originally created faith in a person, "(For we walk by faith and not by sight)" (Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 6:12). It is the Word of God that begat us. It is the same Word that the Spirit uses to develop our faith that we may grow into the likeness of Christ (1 Pet. 1:23). It is not God strengthening the Christian by a direct contact of the essence of Deity in the person of the Holy Spirit on the substance of the human spirit (the "naked" essence of Deity on the "naked" substance of man's spirit). It is the Spirit **through** His instrument who strengthens us, but only with our cooperation, that is, our submission to His instructions (Phil. 2:12; Heb. 5:10).

Fitted For Glory By The Spirit

Christians are fitted for glory through the instructive powers of the Word. Paul declared to the Ephesian elders, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Remember that these men addressed by Paul were qualified and serving as elders. Being that they lived in the days of miracles (the infant

stage of the church) there is no reason to believe that these men could not perform miracles (Jas. 5:14-15). That being the case they had powers no one living today has. Nevertheless, Paul commended them to the Word of God for their spiritual upbuilding. Mind you, there was no completed New Testament. In the infant stage of the church the Word of God was meted out to them in part and parcel (1 Cor. 13:10-12). Nevertheless, Paul commended them to the Word of His Grace for their spiritual edification. Thus, the Psalmist declared, "...strengthen me according unto thy word" (Psm. 119:28).

The Spirit Gives Christian Spiritual Light

Originally, the revelation of the Spirit brought us the glad tidings of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15; Rom. 1:16). Thereby, He gave us spiritual "light." "The entrance of thy word giveth light." (Psm. 119:130). "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psm. 19:8). To continue in faithful service to God we must continue in the light of the truth of the gospel. It is the instrument of the Spirit to convict, convert, and sanctify a person (1 Cor. 15:58, Rom. 13:12; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12).

The apostle John wrote, "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). What does it mean to walk in the light? The answer is found in Acts 2:42. Therein Luke recorded that the early church "...continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Surely, it is not difficult to understand that to "walk in the light" is the equivalent of continuing "stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine." If not, why not?

The Holy Spirit and Wisdom

The Holy Spirit also supplies wisdom to the Christian. Indeed, Christians are instructed to pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5). I know of no Christians who do not so pray. However, the Spirit does not infuse wisdom into a Christian without a medium. It may be a medium that we do not understand, but God is going to respect and operate on man according to the manner in which He made him and not contrary to it. Even in revelation and inspiration the faculties of man were employed and not by-passed in getting the truth into the world (1 Tim. 4:1).

Regarding miracles, power to do such was given the miracle worker, but there is no inspired record that the moral and rational constitution of man was by-passed in the process. The Psalmist wrote, "The law of the Lord in perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psa. 19:7). Notice, please, that "the testimony of the Lord" provides wisdom to "the simple." Furthermore, "For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 2:6). Moreover, wisdom may come to us from the experiences of life, friends, enemies, animals, family, and brethren in the Lord. All of these serve as modes through which God answers our prayers for wisdom. In whatever way God gives us wisdom it will not violate the Word of God or the constitution of the human mind or spirit in granting it.

Providence and the Christian

"Providence" means the work that God does on behalf of human beings that is different from that provided in the revelation of His Word, but not in contradistinction to it. We may say that providence involves God working "behind the scenes" or in ways of which we never can be sure. Today, God does not inform us regarding such work

as he did with the apostle Paul (Acts 16:6-7). Consider some of what the Bible teaches regarding the providential acts of God.

1. God answers prayer (Matt. 7:7-11; Jas. 5:16; Jas. 1:5; 1 Peter 3:12-13). To answer a prayer God must decide and act on our behalf. He has in His Word promised so to do.
2. God punishes evil people even in this life (Rom. 12:19;13:4).
3. God blesses Christians (1 Pet. 5:5-7; 2 Cor. 9:6-11; Rom. 8:28-32).
4. God delivers Christians from temptation (1 Cor. 10:12-13).
5. God chastens His children (1 Pet. 5:10; Heb. 12:6-10).
6. God directs our lives (Jas. 4:13-15).
7. God provides our physical and material needs (Matt. 6:25-33).

God is vitally interested in His children. He knows every hair on our head. As Peter wrote, “He careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

God did not begin the Christian system and then leave us until the end of the world (Deism). In His Word He tells us of His constant abiding attention to the world and all things therein. Especially does He communicate to His children His love and care for them in every area of life both spiritual and material.

Sealed With The Holy Spirit Of Promise, The Earnest Of Our Inheritance

There is no way that I would trust the Bible as the Word of God except that adequate evidence and credible witnesses have confirmed it to be from God and not from

men (1 Thess. 5:20). Chief among the proofs that the Bible is divine are the miracles, signs, and wonders worked by Holy Spirit empowered men. Thereby, the Word was confirmed (Heb. 2:3-4). Hence, I believe the promise of God, which promise includes the eternal inheritance that belongs only to Christians.

In Ephesians 1:13, Paul tells Christians we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. I do not believe that this passage pertains to something the Holy Spirit does directly to a Christian's inward man or human spirit to enable or empower one through the Holy Spirit personally indwelling him.

We have already established that in conviction, conversion, and sanctification the Holy Spirit operates to accomplish this threefold task through His rule of action or law designed to accomplish such. This implies man's cooperation. It is man's part to render obedience to the truth pertaining to becoming a Christian and living the Christian life. Until he became a Christian God's face, as it were, was turned from a man. Having become a Christian, God's face is turned toward a man. Paul's declaration is simply informational. It tells us that because of one's obedience to the truth God views that person as His child, a citizen of the kingdom of Heaven and not one who is alienated from Him. As Paul wrote, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Through his attributes (omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, etc.) God is able to will and work on behalf of His children, the church, as they seek to bring every thought into subject to Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

As Paul wrote to Timothy, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19). It

is obvious that the seal of which Paul speaks here is that a faithful child of God never has to be concerned about being forgotten or overlooked by God because the confirmed Word has so declared it. He knows whom the blood of the Lamb covers. The conclusion Christians should draw from this is seen in the following words of Paul. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). This is how one is righteous or faithful before God (Rev. 2:10). It is according to the rule of action established by God to sanctify the child of God (John 17:17). As I have written, when such a person prays an effectual fervent prayer God is able to supply his needs according to His will (James 4:15; 5:16).

Conclusion

The part of this study that is the most important is this. God will not bless us except that we are doing only what He has authorized in His Son's New Testament (Matt. 6:33). How God through His Spirit accomplishes what he does for His children is not that much of a concern for me. I know that the Holy Spirit has set out the primary area of my concern. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecc. 12:13). This may seem too simplistic a solution to some. But that view may say more about their own personal agenda than it does about their good sense. On the conclusion set out by the Holy Spirit all honest and good-hearted people may unite. Let us highly resolve to emphasize those truths of the Scriptures that reveal our obligations to God and how we are to discharge them and I have no doubt God will take care of His side of the matter (Deut. 29:29).

Endnotes

- 1 Rush, Terry, **The Holy Spirit Makes No Earthly Sense** (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Col., 1991), p .38.
- 2 Ibid., p. 74.
- 3 Ibid., p. 70.
- 4 Ibid., p. 24.
- 5 Ibid., p. 60.
- 6 Ibid., p. 38.
- 7 Ibid., p. 63.
- 8 Shelly, Rubel, **Love Lines**, “Living by the Spirit” (Nashville, TN: Woodmont Hills Church of Christ, Vol. 24. No. 19, May 13, 1998), p. 2
- 9 Webster’s 9th New Collegiate Dictionary
- 10 Campbell, Alexander and Rice, N. L., **Campbell-Rice Debate**, (Lexington, KY: A. T. Skilliman & Son, 1844), p. 617.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 750-751.
- 12 Zachary, James W., **The Witness of the Spirits**, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1954), p.211.
- 13 Sweeny, Z. T, **The Spirit and The Word**, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, no copyright), pp. 144-145.
- 14 Hailey, Homer, **God’s Eternal Purpose and The Covenants**, (Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, Inc., 1998), p. 75.
- 15 For a full treatment of my views on this see the chapter I wrote in the 1996 Denton lectures book on Romans.

CHAPTER 19

THE JEALOUSY OF GOD

KEVIN BEARD

WHAT ENDEAVOR COULD TEST the human mind more than to understand God? How can the finite understand the infinite? How can the imperfect understand the perfect? How can the creature understand the Creator? If we seek complete understanding, then our task will fail. Even if the human mind were capable of completely understanding all His ways, God has chosen not to reveal all His ways to us (Deut. 29:29). However, those things that He has chosen to reveal supply for us all that we need to know to understand God. This makes it possible for us to spend our lives loving, serving, respecting, and reverencing Him.

Many of God's attributes make sense to human reasoning. His omnipotence and omniscience, His love and mercy, even His justice and wrath are attributes of God that most would expect to find. Yet God proclaims of Himself, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God" (Exod. 20:5). Upon learning this, some may ask, "How can a God who is perfect be jealous and still be perfect? Wouldn't His jealousy make Him imperfect?" These questions are indeed valid and will be answered in this discussion. Since God does say of Himself that He is a jealous God, there must be some significance there for us to observe. How has His jealousy affected His dealings with man through the ages and how does that jealousy affect man today?

When we understand God's jealousy, we ought to be more able to serve Him acceptably. This study of God's jealousy should help the humble servant of God to be more faithful and more loyal to our Heavenly Father.

How Can a Perfect God Be Jealous?

That God is a jealous God is stated often in the Bible, and most often in the Old Testament. In giving the ten commandments, God declared Himself to be jealous in the context of His forbidding the people to make graven images and worship them (Exod. 20:4-6). The Lord says His name is "Jealous" when commanding the Israelites not to make covenants with the people of Canaan, nor to worship their gods (Exod. 34:12-14). Three times in the book of Deuteronomy Jehovah proclaims that He is a jealous God as He warned the people against serving the gods of the heathen (Deut. 4:23-24; 5:8-10; 6:14-16). Joshua warned Israel that if they forsook the Lord, He would turn and do them hurt, because He is a jealous God (Josh. 24:19-20). God also speaks of being provoked to jealousy, and bringing some punishment upon the people (Num. 25:11; Deut. 29:18-20; 32:15-16, 21; 1 Kings 14:22; Psm. 78:58). All of these warnings were directed negatively to Israel; that is, the Jews would suffer the consequences of God's jealousy if they violated the given commands.

God's jealousy also brought about His protection and providence for His people. Through Ezekiel, the Lord promised to return His people to their homeland and again he would be jealous for his holy name (Ezek. 39:25). Joel told the people that God would ". . . be jealous for his land, and pity his people," restoring their harvests and removing their enemies (Joel 2:18-20).

Against the enemies of Israel, God's jealousy brought about His wrath. Nahum announced that ". . . the Lord revengeth and is furious; . . ." toward His enemies because

He is jealous (Nah. 1:2). Isaiah said that the Lord would prevail against His enemies, having stirred up His jealousy (Isa. 42:24). God declared that in the fire of His jealousy He would bring wrath upon the heathen nations that despoiled Israel (Ezek. 36:5-6).

God is a jealous God. But God is also a holy God (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:16). In fact, the Lord's holiness is such that He cannot even look upon iniquity (Hab. 1:13). How then can this be, if God is jealous? The common usage of the word "jealous" has a negative connotation. We hear of jealous husbands or wives who distrust their mates and question every possible wrong action they make. Jealousy is often closely associated with envy, which is a sin (Rom. 1:29-32), but jealousy is not necessarily a sinful characteristic. Webster defines the word "jealous" as follows: "intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness. . . vigilant in guarding a possession."¹ So then if one uses these definitions, what would be wrong with being a jealous husband? Certainly a husband or wife would not be wrong for being intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness. In fact, one would be wrong if he did tolerate rivalry for or unfaithfulness from his spouse.

An illustration of this fact is seen from the law of Moses regarding a husband who suspected his wife of having committed adultery, yet had no hard evidence of the fact. In such a case, God had prescribed a course of action to settle the dispute. Numbers 5:11-31 outlines the details of the law of jealousy. The jealous husband was to bring his wife to the priest with an offering of barley meal, not mixed with oil and frankincense. The priest was to take holy water in an earthen vessel and mix into it dust from the floor of the tabernacle. The priest then, before the woman, recited an oath which threatened an agonizing disease upon the woman if she were indeed guilty. The woman was to answer "Amen, amen," showing her

acceptance of the conditions of the oath, and in effect declaring her innocence. After this the barley meal was offered to the Lord, and then the woman drank the “bitter water” and her guilt or innocence was demonstrated by the Lord’s power in causing her either to suffer the threatened malady or not. Whether or not the woman was guilty, her husband was considered “guiltless from iniquity” in this action (Num. 5:31). This kind of jealousy results from the unique relationship between a husband and his wife. Keil and Delitzsch aver:

As any suspicion cherished by a man against his wife, that she either is or has been guilty of adultery, whether well-founded or not, is sufficient to shake the marriage connection to its very roots, and to undermine, along with marriage, the foundation of the civil commonwealth, it was of the greatest importance to guard against this moral evil, which was so utterly irreconcilable with the holiness of the people of God, by appointing a process in harmony with the spirit of the theocratical law, and adapted to bring to light the guilt or innocence of any wife who had fallen into such suspicion, and at the same time to warn fickle wives against unfaithfulness.²

God knew how destructive suspicion was to a marriage. He also knew that a man would not and could not accept unfaithfulness from his wife. For this reason, He made provision for the jealousy of a suspicious husband, and such jealousy was not held against him.

It is in this sense that we must understand God’s jealousy. The relationship between the Lord and His people was a spiritual marriage. When Israel and Judah worshipped idols, God considered it to be tantamount to

adultery. The Lord told Jeremiah that when Israel had practiced idolatry “upon every high mountain and under every green tree” that she had “played the harlot.” (Jer. 3:6). He called their sin “adultery” and said he “had put her away and given her a writing of divorce.” (Jer. 3:8).

God never has and never will tolerate unfaithfulness or rivalry. That was the whole point of His forbidding Israel to worship graven images or to follow the gods of the heathen. They were to worship Him only. Commenting on Zechariah 8:2-3, Hailey wrote: “Jehovah declares His great jealousy for Zion, which indicates His ardent love for His people. He can endure no slight on their part and can brook no rival.”³ He also stated “The term ‘jealousy’ implies divine love which cannot be despised and Jehovah’s refusal to be supplanted in affection by another.”⁴

God’s jealousy also shows itself in His vigilance in guarding His possession. His covenant with Israel made them His own possession:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be mine own possession from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine (Exod. 19:5 ASV).

Another version says they were “a special treasure to Me above all people” (Exod. 19:5, NKJV). In His jealousy, God guarded them with great zeal and vigilance.

God’s jealousy wraps His zeal, His love, His vigilance, His fury, His wrath, His protection, His providence, and His strictness into one divine attribute. Keil and Delitzsch sum up His jealousy well by stating that when the Lord proclaimed Himself to be a jealous God (Exod. 20:5), He meant:

. . . not only. . . a zealous avenger of sinners, but
. . . a jealous God, who will not transfer to

another the honour that is due to Himself (Isa. 42:8; 48:11), nor tolerate the worship of any other god (Isa.34:14), but who directs the warmth of His anger against those who hate Him (Deut. 6:15), with the same energy with which the warmth of His love (S. of Sol. 8:6) embraces those who love Him, . . .⁵

Can a perfect God be jealous? Yes, indeed! Knowing the full extent of what jealousy is and what it involves, it is obvious even that a perfect God not only *can* be jealous, but He *must* be jealous!

How was God's Jealousy Demonstrated in the Past?

We alluded to the fact above, that God demonstrated His jealousy both negatively and positively toward His people. The Lord designed these demonstrations to produce unswerving loyalty and faithfulness in the Hebrew people, but those people refused to heed the warnings and cherish the promises given to them by the God whose name is Jealous.

Jehovah warned Israel repeatedly that idolatry would result in divine chastisement. Leviticus 26 opens with these words:

Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the Lord your God. Ye shall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord (Lev. 26:1-2).

The next part of the chapter catalogs the favors God will bestow upon them if they remain faithful to the covenant He made with them. He promises abundant

harvests, victory over enemies, and His own presence to be continually with them. Why would God do all of this for them?

I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright (Lev. 26:13).

If the people did not follow God's ways, then He would not grant them these favors, but rather would punish them with terrible force. He threatened disease, military defeat, and barren lands. He threatened to send wild beasts among them and to send famine into their land. He threatened to send enemies among them that would desolate their cities and carry the people away as captives. These verses give the details of this more generic warning given with the ten commandments:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments (Exod. 20:5-6).

All of these things were the outflowing of God's jealousy. Because He is a jealous God, He would do all He could to see that they were blessed and prosperous, so long as they kept His covenant. But when they violated the covenant, his jealousy turned to wrath against them as He fulfilled His promise to punish them for their disloyalty.

When the people entered the land of Canaan, God wanted them to be reminded of the covenant, and of the

impending blessings and cursings which were contingent upon their faithfulness. From Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal the blessings and cursings were read aloud to impress upon that first generation of Jews who lived in the promised land how important the keeping of God's law really was (see Deut. 11:26-29; 27:1-28,68; Josh. 8:30-35).

Eventually God brought all of these things upon Israel. He did bless them as He had promised, but He also punished them as He said He would. The greatest expression of God's jealousy was shown in His ultimate punishment of the sinful nation. Israel, which followed after idols with her whole heart, saw the Assyrian armies come in vengeance against them. They were removed from their homeland and taken away to a far country. Strangers from other Assyrian-controlled lands were brought in to inhabit Israel's cities. God removed them from His sight in His jealousy.

As for Judah, God considered their sin to be greater, because they had seen the sins of Israel and the punishment of God upon them, yet still they continued in their sin. The Lord called this to the attention of Jeremiah. "Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done," He asked (Jer. 3:6). Israel's "treacherous sister Judah" saw all the sins of Israel, and knew of the Lord's pleading for them to turn back to Him. Judah saw how God put Israel away like an adulterous wife, yet this brought no change to Judah. Jehovah told the prophet:

... yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord. And the Lord said unto

me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah (Jer. 3:8b-11).

For this brazen rejection of God, the Lord used Babylon to destroy Judah. According to 2 Kings 25, the Babylonian armies surrounded Jerusalem, cutting off the city from outside support for a year and a half. The supplies in the city dwindled away and the people were left without food. King Zedekiah decided to try to escape in the middle of the night. The next day he and his family were captured by the Babylonians. While Zedekiah watched, his sons were killed and then they put out the king's eyes. After this the Babylonians entered Jerusalem, destroyed the city, burned the temple and the palace, leveled the city walls, and took most of the survivors back to Babylon as captives. How severe was God's jealousy? It was severe enough to cause Him to destroy His people.

God's jealousy was not always seen in His wrath exerted on the people for disobedience. His jealousy also protected Israel from enemies' attacks. The book of Numbers records a tremendous example of how God's jealousy worked both to protect and to punish His people (Num. 22-25).⁶ As the Israelites drew near to Canaan at the end of the forty years' wandering, Balak, the king of Moab, grew distressed at the prospect of so great a multitude of people, led by so great a God, coming through his territory. He decided to hire Balaam to curse God's people. Against the Lord's command, Balaam accepted the king's repeated offer and went to curse the Israelites. The donkey on which Balaam rode prevented Balaam's destruction three times. After God opened the donkey's mouth, causing it to speak to Balaam, God told Balaam to go and speak only the things he received from the Lord. Though Balaam wanted to curse Israel, God would not allow it; the curses were turned into blessings. God's

jealousy prevented this enemy from invoking God's power against His own people. However, what Balaam failed to compel God to do, he succeeded in getting Israel to bring upon themselves. Numbers chapter 25 tells of Israel's sin of adultery with Midianite women and idolatry with the Midianite gods. For their wickedness, the Lord sent a plague through the camp that destroyed 24,000 people. It was only the zeal of Phinehas, who took a javelin and thrust it through an Israelite man and a Midianite woman who were committing adultery, that stopped the plague. How was it that Israel became involved in this wickedness with the Midianites? Moses said it was through the counsel of Balaam that they sinned (Num. 31:16). Though God would not allow Balaam's curse to fall on his people, Balaam knew enough about God's jealousy to be able to get Israel to sin, thus having Israel bring God's wrath upon themselves.

How Does God's Jealousy Affect Us Today?

Perhaps one may reason, "God dealt with things differently in Old Testament times. He no longer has a single nation of chosen people. His kingdom is spiritual now, so we don't have to worry about the kinds of things we read about in the Old Testament." Or else there may be some who have the notion that the God of the Old Testament is somehow different in nature from the God of the New Testament. Whatever the reasoning may be, some seem to think that God has changed His view of disobedience, rebellion, stubbornness, willfulness, and so on. Please remember the admonition of the Apostle Paul: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

Now the things we have observed so far are things that were "written aforetime." Why were they written? So that we might learn from them. What else can we learn

from them if we do not learn that God is intolerant of rivalry and unfaithfulness? Certainly those things were not written merely for our entertainment. God was jealous in those days and He is still jealous today.

Many of the things in the Old Testament pointed to things in the New Testament. For example, all the sacrifices of the old law pointed to the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Israel, God's chosen people, pointed to the church, God's chosen people today. The tabernacle (its design, its layout, its furnishings, etc.) pointed to the church. In all of these, and many others that could be listed, the things to which the Old Testament figures pointed are always greater than the figure itself. This is the whole point of the book of Hebrews. The old law was filled with types and figures which had their fulfillment in Christ, and in His New Testament. In every case, the fulfillment is superior to the figure.

Now then, if the old law foreshadowed greater things to come in the new, should we expect God's jealousy to be less in the new than it was in the old? Certainly not! Though it is not mentioned as often, or as graphically, God's jealousy is still seen in the New Testament. Jesus demands complete loyalty from us:

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24)... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Matt. 6:33).

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after

me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it (Matt. 10:37-39).

And he said unto them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62).

All of these passages show that God's jealousy still exists and that He still demands first place in the lives of His followers. What does this mean to the Christian? It means that we must separate ourselves from the world. Of course we cannot do this physically (see 1 Cor. 5:9-10), but we must do this spiritually. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:17). "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). Our complete loyalty and allegiance must be given to Christ.

A specific application of this point must be made regarding those who compromise the Lord's teaching to establish fellowship with those outside the body of Christ. Many among us today are setting aside the Lord's teaching on various matters so that they may find common ground with those in denominations. Some promote the idea that the things which determine fellowship between believers in Christ are relatively few. This idea has been called the "core gospel." At the core of the "core gospel" is the notion that some Bible doctrines are essential, some are not; some are important, some are not. Dave Miller states:

"Core gospel" advocates hold that fellowship may

be enacted on the basis of a brief list of beliefs which all factions within Christendom have held in common. Ironically, agreement on what is to be included in the “core gospel” is lacking. But most seem to agree that belief in Jesus—especially His death, burial and resurrection—is the central thesis about which we must agree in order to have fellowship.⁷

Those who follow this formula will accept all who believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as their brethren in Christ. What about differences on such things as instrumental music, the role of women, premillennialism, and the like? According to Miller, those who follow the “core gospel” would say that any viewpoint which is not within the “core gospel” “. . . must be held as opinion and not allowed to hamper fellowship with those who hold a differing opinion on that issue.”⁸ This throws the door wide open for all the “unity in diversity” supporters. All the issues which have divided the Lord’s church from the denominations now become non-issues. And based on this line of thinking, members of the Lord’s church become free to participate in the community-wide, interdenominational worship services, or Promise Keepers, or whatever other ecumenical program may be offered by the local or national religious community.

But there is at least one major problem with this whole line of thinking. The Lord never gave us the authority to select which of His doctrines we thought were important and which were not! Remember that the Lord is a jealous God. The God whose will was “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3), is the same God whose will is “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). What about those who claimed Jesus as Lord, yet did not

serve Him according to the will of the Father in heaven? Jesus said, “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23). Even though these people claimed Jesus as their Lord; even though they (by their own admission) did “many wonderful works;” Jesus never recognized any fellowship with them, nor approved of them or their works.

Paul admonished the Colossians “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). Now for many years, gospel preachers have correctly explained that this verse means that we must have the authority of Christ for all that we do. Contrary to the thinking of some, the fact that this has been taught for a long, long time changes nothing about whether this is the correct interpretation of that verse. So, do we have authority from Christ to have fellowship with those who do not do the will of the Father in heaven? How can we have authority from Christ to do that which He Himself refused to do? We must remember the words of the Apostle John:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

In the church in Corinth, Paul had to deal with a problem which involved the worship of idols. Some understood that eating meat which had been sacrificed to an idol was a morally neutral action. Yet some took this liberty too far, and participated in the sacrificial feasts

themselves. In that context, eating the meat became wrong, because by their presence and participation in the pagan worship, they gave the impression that they were worshipping the pagans' gods. Paul told the Corinthians not to do this. Notice the reasoning he gave:

Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? (1 Cor. 10:21-22).

By their actions they were dividing their loyalty between the Lord and demons. In fact, in their participation in the idolatrous feasts, they came into communion with the demons whom the pagans worshipped. Such action provoked God's jealousy, Paul said. Lipscomb made a pertinent application of this principle in his day, which needs to be heeded today as well:

This principle also applies with all its force to the compliance of professed Christians with the religious services of churches that are using mechanical instruments of music in the worship of God. Whatever their intention may be, by the force of the act they become one with those in whose worship they join. We constitute with them and with the methods of their worship one communion.⁹

This is not a matter of religious arrogance. It is a matter of respect for God's jealousy. We do not have the right to change God's will. Did Nadab and Abihu have the right to change God's will concerning the burning of incense (Lev. 10:1-3)? Did Korah have the right to change

God's will concerning the priesthood (Num. 16:1-35)? Did David have the right to change God's will concerning the moving of the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6:1-11)? Do we have the right to change those things with which we disagree, or those things we do not consider to be important? God is a jealous God who does not tolerate unfaithfulness.

Conclusion

We serve the Almighty God. He is perfect in all His ways. Because He is perfect in all His ways, He demands complete faithfulness from His followers, and He guards those followers with the greatest of vigilance. This is the jealousy of God. Because we know God to be a jealous God, and because we know what His jealousy entails, we are better able to serve Him. We know that He tolerates no unfaithfulness or rivalry, therefore we serve Him loyally. We know that He guards His possession with vigilance, therefore we love Him and trust Him to care for us as He has promised.

Endnotes

1 Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, (1989), s. v. "jealous."

2 C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, **Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament**, vol. III. The Pentateuch, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 29-30.

3 Homer Hailey, **A Commentary on the Minor Prophets** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 359.

4 Ibid., 327.

5 C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, **Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament**, vol. II, The Pentateuch, 116.

6 Bobby Duncan, "Call and Motivation for Obedience to God's Law," in **The Book of Deuteronomy: The Love of God and Man's Response**, ed., Curtis A. Cates (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching, 1988), 44-45. Brother Duncan has an excellent discussion of this point. See his article in the MSOP Lectureship book for his

insights into this wonderful example of God's character at work in the history of His people.

7 Dave Miller, **Piloting the Strait** (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996), 135-136.

8 Ibid., 136.

9 David Lipscomb, **A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles**, vol. II, First Corinthians (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1989), 156.

CHAPTER 20

THE NAMES OF GOD

JIM LAWS

GOD, *THE CREATOR AND SUSTAINER* of the universe, has provided mankind with a revelation of himself in two important ways. First, God has revealed Himself through the natural world in which we live. David in the Psalms stated, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psm. 19:1). David makes reference to the fact that when one considers the marvelous makeup of his created physical body that it is but another indication of the divine intelligence behind it all (God). Psalm 139:14 states, “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.” Paul pens much the same sentiment when he says:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

God has not left Himself without witness. (Acts 14:17). We can see his divine design and intelligent purpose behind the created world.¹ Second, even though it is the case that man can come to know something of

the God of the Bible through the world in which we live, God has revealed himself to man in a more complete way through the Bible. It is through the Bible that man has the greatest revelation of God. In fact, we would be woefully ignorant of God and completely ignorant of his will for our lives if we did not have the Bible.

For instance, we know from our study of the Bible that God is a spirit (John 4:24), that is, God does not have a physical body as man does nor does He have any measurable form. God is changeless (Heb. 1:12) in His divine nature. Progress and change may be seen in His dealings with man but are not a part of the divine nature. God is all-powerful (Gen. 17:1; 18:14). God never grows weary (Isa. 40:27-31). God is all knowing (Job 38:39; Rom. 11:33-36). This simply means that God knows everything simultaneously. God has the power to know the thought and motive of every heart (Job 37:16; Psm. 147:5; Heb. 3:13). God is everywhere (Psm. 139:7-12). This simply means that God is not confined to any part of the universe but is present in all His power at every point in space and every moment in time. God is eternal (2 Pet. 3:8; Rev. 1:8). Such an attribute as this refers to God and his relationship to time. All past, present, and future time is equal to Him.²

The Bible has a unique way of helping us come to a better understanding of who and what God is by the names that are used for God. In Bible times, titles or designations given to God throughout the Bible were important. In fact, in the ancient world, knowing another's name was a special privilege that offered access to that person's thoughts and life. Names today are more intended for identification purposes; however, Bible names were descriptive. The Hebrews placed a great deal of significance to the names, which were given. Names such as Nathanael (gift of God), Samuel (heard

of God), and Adonijah (Yahweh is my Lord) are but a few examples. This is seen with reference to the name Jesus. The scripture states, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). One can see from this that names were important in Biblical times as they gave symbolism to people, places, and things as well as giving understanding to the character of the individual being referred to.

God has favored humankind by revealing Himself by several important names. In fact, the names for God offer special insight into his love and righteousness. Therefore, the major thrust of this research will be devoted to a study of the names for God used in the Scriptures. In learning more of the basic meaning of these important Biblical terms we will be able to come to a better understanding of God.

For the purposes of this study, the names of God will be divided into three different categories. First, it will deal with those names that may be termed “absolute,” that is to say, names that refer to God either in terms of the concept of God or refer to Him in a personal way. Second, there are those names found in the Bible which may be termed “attributive,” that is, names which qualify or teach of the nature of the divine being. Then, third, a practical section will be included that presents the important value of coming to a better understanding of these great names which are given to man about God. It is admitted that these categories may at times seem to be somewhat arbitrary as the different names for God which have been given will at times spill over from one category into another. However, to think of these names in such a fashion will certainly aid the students understanding as to their respective meanings.

Names That Are Absolute In Nature (Personal Names)

JEHOVAH/YAHWEH

The name JEHOVAH is the vocalized word for the Hebrew word YHWH. It is the most important name for God in the Old Testament. It comes from the verb “to be” meaning simply, but yet very profoundly, “He is.” The full name of God is found in Exodus 3:14, which states, “And God said unto Moses, ‘I AM THAT I AM’: and he said, ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.’” Moses wonders what he is to say when he is asked about the name of God. Then this statement from God is given in essence saying, “I am who I am” or “I will be who I will be.” Therefore, the name that God gives Moses from the burning bush is the name, YHWH.

God had earlier revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as Yahweh (Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 26:25; Ex. 3:15). However, a deeper more significant meaning to the name is now given as Moses is sent to Egypt and he is told to tell them that “I am” has sent me to you. (As one reads Exodus 6:3 he realizes that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not understand this deeper, fuller meaning of the name as it was given to Moses). Keil & Delitzsch make the following statement about this important name and its significance:

This name precluded any comparison between the God of the Israelites and the deities of the Egyptians and other nations, and furnished Moses and his people with strong consolation in their affliction, and a powerful support to their confidence in the realization of His purposes of salvation as made known to the fathers.³

Therefore, Moses received from God divine assurance that Moses would receive God's assistance in the matter of going to Egypt. God has revealed himself to Moses by means of the burning bush as YHWH, the self-existent, or eternal one; Jehovah.

There could not have been a more appropriate way to convey the meaning of this great name than from what the reader sees coming from the burning bush of Exodus 3. The bush was a vivid symbol of the inexhaustible dynamic power of God, who burns like a fire with love and righteousness yet remains the same and never diminishes. He is the "self-existent" one, the one who is eternal as opposed to the false gods of Egypt. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and is personally concerned with His people and the accomplishing of His divine plan for them.

It is from this basic root name that a number of names have been based all of which refer to God. For instance, there is *Jehovah-jireh*, which is translated, "the Lord Will Provide," and commemorates the provision of the ram in place of Isaac for Abraham's sacrifice (Gen. 22:14). There is *Jehovah-nissi* which means, "the Lord Is My Brother," and it honors God and his defeat of the Amalekites (Exod. 17:15). There is *Jehovah-shalom* which is translated "The Lord Is Peace" which is the name Gideon gave the altar that he built in Ophrah (Judg. 6:24). There is the name *Jehovah-tsebaoth* which means "The Lord Of Host" and was used in the days of David and the prophets witnessing to the almighty God of sovereign power who is surrounded by his heavenly hosts (1 Sam. 1:3). Then, there is the name *Jehovah Elohe Yisrael* which is translated, "The Lord God of Israel" and is found in the book of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Psalms. The names found in the Bible which are similar to this would be *Netsah Yisrael*, "The Strength of Israel" (1 Sam.

15:29) and *Abir Yisrael*, which means “The Mighty One of Israel” (Isa. 1:24).

The Hebrew names YHWH and Adhonay (which corresponds closely to kurios – Lord - in the New Testament) become interesting from a translation standpoint. The Hebrews had such respect for the name YHWH that the actual pronunciation was lost. As Hebrews would come to the name YHWH (referred to in scholarly circles as the tetragrammaton) they would insert the pronunciation Adhonay (Lord). By combining the consonants of YHWH with the vowels of Adhonay the word Jehovah was created. The ASV uses the word Jehovah throughout as the translation for YHWH, though English translations since Coverdale represent the combination of vowels and consonants by the capitals LORD.

El

The root name El is an important name found in the pages of the Bible. The term is found throughout the Old Testament and is found more often in Job and the Psalms. As one will find, it is frequently combined with nouns or adjectives to express the divine name with references to particular attributes or phrases of his being (*El Elyon*). When used by itself to refer to God, it does so in the most general of terms. In fact, the name often refers to false gods. El was the god of the Canaanites whose son was Baal. However, when used to refer to the one true God of the Bible it is often used with a qualifier like Jehovah: “I, the Lord (Jehovah) your God (Elohim), am a jealous God (El)” (Deut. 5:9).

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba “and there called on the name of the Lord (Yahweh), the Everlasting God” (*El Olam* - Gen. 21:33). Jacob built an altar on a piece of land he purchased at Shechem and

called it *El Elohe* Israel (God, the God of Israel), commemorating his wrestling with the angel at the place he called Peniel, (the face of God), and receiving his new name Israel (Gen. 32:28–30; 33:20). The term *El Shaddai* (God Almighty), signifying God as a source of blessing, is the name with which God appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 6:3).

Scholars seem to give different interpretations to the root meaning of the term, and it looks as if no real agreement is coming in the near future. However, as Jacob put it:

It seems to us that the idea of power, involving also that of pre-eminence, most adequately expresses the reality designated by El: the mountains of El (Psm. 36:7), the cedars of El (Psm. 80:11), the stars of El (Isa. 14:13).⁴

ELOHIM

The term Elohim is plural in form and is the most frequently used term for God in the Old Testament. The term's closest New Testament equivalent would be "theos." It is one of a number of kindred terms such as El and Eloah. Brown, Driver, and Briggs take the view that it is a derivative of 'Alah – "to be strong" and thus the essential meaning of the three forms, El, Eloah, and Elohim.⁵ This would make its root meaning refer to might or power.

One begins to see something of the significance of this divine name for God as it is used time and again in Genesis one and the Biblical account of creation. Moses, by inspiration, is saying in effect that it was God (Elohim), the all powerful One who created heaven and earth. It was not the false gods of the land of Egypt, Babylon, or Assyria. In reality, God (Elohim), is responsible for the world in which men live. The world

is the result of his miraculous creative power. There is a good bit of discussion surrounding the full import of this name for God.

It is important to note that the term is plural in form. However, the plural form of the term should not cause confusion. Both the Old and the New Testament state clearly that there is one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 states, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." 1 Corinthians 8:6 states, "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."

The Godhead is of a single nature though there are three distinct beings who share in that divine nature. The thought has been argued that the use of the plural form in this name specifically suggests the fact that there are three that share in this divine nature; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Perhaps a case can be made for such, however, this can not be said for certain. We know from the New Testament (John 1:3; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16) that God was speaking to Christ when he said, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26); the Godhead is a threefold being. However, this much is certain, even though the term employs the plural form it is translated in the singular and it is basically understood that the plural use of the term is an ancient near eastern way of suggesting majesty or "all-mightiness."

YAHWEH, EL AND ELOHIM

When one begins to consider these important terms for God in the Hebrew Bible one sees that there are areas of similarity between them. There are occasions in which any one of them may be used for God in the Scriptures, however, this certainly does not mean that they are identical or interchangeable, as there are

differences that occur between them and their usage.

For instance, in Genesis 27:20 when Isaac questions Jacob about the quick return from the field with the venison, Jacob deceives his father with the words, "Because Yahweh your God (Elohim) granted me success." To interchange "Yahweh" and "Elohim" in this instance would not make sense. Yahweh is the name by which his father worships the supreme God (Elohim). Closely connected with this is the fact that many regard Genesis 14 as giving a true picture of the situation in the early days of the patriarchs. There, one reads of Abraham meeting with Melchizedek, the priest of "el 'elyon," the most high God.

It would certainly be a mistake to substitute *Elohim* or *Yahweh* for "el 'elyon" (Gen. 14:18). Melchizedek blesses Abraham in the name of el 'elyon, maker of heaven and earth, so identifying *el 'elyon* as the supreme God (Gen. 14:19-20). The king of Sodom offers a gift to Abraham which he refuses, lifting up his hand to *Yahweh*, *el 'elyon*, maker of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:22). He means that he also worships the supreme God, the same God (for there is only one), but Abraham knows him by the name Yahweh.

Therefore, strictly speaking, Yahweh should be considered more of a personal name of God. Once again, Jacob puts it this way, "Yahweh is always a proper name and as such it carries a definite meaning." This can be seen by the fact that in Genesis wherever the word name is associated with the divine being that name is Yahweh. When Abraham or Isaac built an altar he called on the name of Yahweh (Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 26:25). Yahweh, therefore, is more of a proper noun in contrast with that of El or Elohim which in its plural form expresses more of the concept of Deity.

O. S. Rankin, in his article appearing in *A*

Theological Word Book Of The Bible, makes this statement:

The word Elohim, which is a plural form, may be regarded as an abstract plural emphasizing the concept of deity. It can, for example, be used of the deity whom Israel worshipped or of Astarte, 'the goddess of the Zidonians' (1 Kings 11:5).⁶

The term Yahweh is the special name of the God of Israel. It is the name of a person, though that person is divine. As Rankin points out:

Their God, said the enemies of the Israelites, is a God of the hills (1 Kings 20:23). He reveals himself on Sinai, a mountain in the north Arabian desert, and from this region he comes to help the Israelites when they do battle in the land of Canaan (Judges 5:4).⁷

This therefore seems to express the distinction in the divine names used for God in the Old Testament. Yahweh is a name that presents God as being a person and not as an abstraction. Having personality he has a personal type relationship with the human person. It brings God near to man and he speaks to the Patriarchs as one friend to another.

This makes the revelation of God to Moses most significant. God introduces himself as "I am the God (Elohim) of your fathers" (Exod. 3:6). When God announces his purpose of delivering Israel by the hand of Moses, the latter shows reluctance and begins to make excuses. He inquires, "If ... the people of Israel ... ask me, 'What (mah) is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (Exod. 3:13). The normal way to ask this would have been to use the pronoun "mi"; to use "mah" invites an

answer, which goes further, and gives the meaning or substance of the name.⁸ This helps us understand God's reply, that being, "I AM WHO I AM." In essence, God is giving the inner meaning of his divine name.

Names That Are Attributive In Nature (Qualifying Names)

Kadhosh

The name Kadhosh (Holy One) is a name found frequently in Isaiah and in the Psalms and occasionally in the prophets. It is somewhat of a characteristic of the book of Isaiah, being found 32 times in that book; "Holy one of Israel." It signifies the great transcendent nature of God; He is separate from all other beings. In fact the idea of "being separated" or "to be separate" best explains its use both of man and of God.

The holiness of God is taught through the pages of the Bible (Exod. 15:11; Lev. 11:44-45; 20:26; 1 Sam. 2:2). It was Isaiah and the vision that he received which gives a graphic picture of the holy character of God. There, Isaiah says that he saw God high and lifted up, and the seraphim cried, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). The New Testament teaches of the holiness of God with equal force (Matt. 5:48; Luke 1:49; John 17:11; Jas. 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:15). It was John in the Revelation when he saw the vision of the Lord who fell as one dead (Rev. 1:17).

Shadday

The name Shadday, "almighty" is found in patriarchal material as well as in the book of Job. There are times when the compound 'el Shadday, appears which, though the root meanings may be somewhat disputed, as has its basic meaning, "to destroy", "to

terrify.” In other words God is manifested by the terribleness of his mighty acts.

To give God such a name as the “almighty one” certainly contributes to the understanding of the divine nature. The power and might of God are seen in any number of ways. It is seen in his creative power; God spoke and it was done. The power of God is seen in the many miracles that God has performed. His power is seen in the healing of the lame, the blind, the deaf, and the raising of the dead. The divine power of God is also demonstrated in the restoration of sinful man back to God. Man’s redemption is made possible by the power of God. The coming of Christ, the perfect life which he lived, the divine message he gave, his death, burial, as well as his miraculous resurrection from the dead, are all to be attributed to the omnipotent power of the “Almighty one.”

‘Abhir

The term ‘Abhir, “mighty one” is found in the text with Israel or Jacob (Gen. 49:24; Psm. 132:2-5; Isa. 1:24; 49:26; 60:16). The term expresses the assurance of the divine strength in behalf of the oppressed in Israel (Isa. 1:24) as well as in behalf of Israel against her oppressors.

This term as with Shadday, conveys the divine power of God, but ‘Abhir seems to focus more upon the people of God needing Him and His divine power. It is only that divine power that will save them in their hour of need. This was the message of the prophets, that being, do not put your hope and trust in foreign alliances with Egypt or other nations, put your hope and trust in the one who can truly save; God. This focus is given also in the Psalms as God is depicted as the champion of the widow and orphan, the underprivileged. While others would take advantage of the poor, it was God

who would be there for them.

Elyon

The Hebrew term ‘Elyon, meaning “most high,” is used as descriptive term describing God as being above other nations (Deut. 32:8; Psm. 18:13). The God of the Bible is the exalted one who is lifted far above other gods (who are in reality false in nature) and men (who are but created beings in their nature).⁹

How This Helps Us Know God Better

Knowing the names for God given for us in the Bible will cause one to grow in faith in the fact of God’s existence. They tell us not only that He exists, but also they reveal in a vivid way His divine nature. By studying these divine designations man learns that God is, among other things, eternal; He is uncaused; He is independent; He is self-sufficient.

All other gods are simply nonexistent. They are simply the inventions of the mind of man. On the other hand, the God of the Bible, is known by these divine names that have been studied that describe His essence. He is the one true God of heaven and earth. For instance, to say that God is eternal means that what He says is always correct and never wrong. What God has said about the creation is correct as He was there creating the world in which men live. What He has said in His Word, the Bible, is always right and can be depended upon. Due to the fact that God exists and because of His divine nature, we can depend on God to keep His word. God is not bound by time as are we (2 Pet. 3:9).

To fail to understand God properly as to whom he is will cause one to have a false view of God. This is seen to be important because one’s view of God, influences how an individual will view everything else

in life. To have a low or unscriptural view of God will cause one to lead a life that is not in keeping with God and His will for our lives.

Paul makes this point regarding the Gentiles in the first part of Romans. Notice Paul's statement:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things (Rom. 1:21-23).

Their concept of God is directly related to the lives that they lived (vs. 23-32). To come to a proper understanding of who and what God is will cause one to grow in his love and devotion to the one whom created us all.

Knowing the names of God given for us in the Bible will cause one to grow in faith in the divine work of God. Study the work of God through the pages of Biblical history, and you will see that God has been working to bring about His great plan of salvation for all men. He was bringing about a people for his purpose, plan, and praise in the Old Testament. The divine plan or scheme of redemption, if you will, that God has given to man is but one indication of His great wisdom and power. It is a manifestation of His great wisdom in giving man the remedy that will take care of his most serious problem and that is the problem man faces with sin. His divine plan of salvation demonstrates His great power in that He has brought it about in the way that He has. Paul states that this divine plan was in the mind of God all along. "According to the eternal purpose which he

purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Eph. 3:11-12).

By studying the names found for God in the pages of the Old Testament one grows in his love for God. “God is love,” so he “pitieth them that fear him” (Psm. 103:13). The great love of God for man caused Him to take the initiative in the matter of man’s redemption. If this matter has been left up to man then man would never have had a hope for obtaining eternal life. God is described as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth” (Exod. 34:6). In Psalm 136, every verse of the Psalm ends with the statement, “For his loving kindness endureth for ever.” As we understand the names for God better we will grow in our love for Him, as we should.

Knowledge of Him will cause one to grow in respect and reverence. There has always been the tendency of man to fail to show the proper respect that is due that which is sacred. God’s instruction to the Israelites was that they were not to take the name of God in vain (Exod. 20:7). They were not to speak of it frivolously or irreverently. The name of God is sacred and is not to be used in a trifling way. This high regard for the name of God was taken so seriously by the Hebrews that they would not pronounce the name of God.

Consequently through the ages, the specific pronunciation for the term YHWH has been lost. Compare this attitude with the modern practice of using God’s name in disrespectful ways with just about each passing breath. Modern man needs to come to a deeper level of understanding of the sacred so as to grow in respect for God as man should. The rash swearing, so common in our day, the mentioning of the name of God,

or any of His attributes in the form of a by word, using the name of God lightly and carelessly and without regard to its significance, must be stopped to be pleasing in His sight. Man shall be judged for every idle word that passes from his lips. Matthew 12:36 states, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

Greater reverence for God will cause the obedient to worship God as God has directed and out of a sincere heart. Jesus said, "God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Worship must be sincere from the heart and it must be according to truth revealed by God in the Scriptures. This fact was just as true in the Old Testament as it is in the New. God has always want worship to be directed by His divine pattern and to come from the sincere heart of man. The desire to worship God more meaningfully grows when the sincere Bible student learns that he is worshipping the great God (YHWH) who always was, and is, and always will be. When one learns that the one he worships is the all-mighty God (el Shadday), the God (Elohim) who created heaven and earth, the One who is holy in all of His attributes (Qadhosh), then his worship will be more sincere, governed by truth, and filled with genuine praise.

For the child of God, having knowledge of the names of God given in the Bible will fill one with hopeful expectation of meeting God one great day. Such a meeting with the great I AM of the ages will be like nothing we have experienced before. John by means of the vision described the ceaseless worship of the heavenly creatures before the throne of God. Their praise of Him in part included the statement, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (Rev. 4:8).

Endnotes

1 It is not within the limitations of this assignment to consider the important question of man and his ability to know God. It is assumed for this study that Man can come to knowledge of God and God expects that of him. In fact, man's salvation in heaven is dependent on such knowledge. This does not mean that man can fully understand God. As Job put it, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection" (Job 11:7)?

Due to the limitations of the human mind how can one say that he fully comprehends all that there is to understand about the infinite being of God? Obviously, one can not. Paul states, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33). No one disputes the fact that, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16). Yet in a practical way God expects us to know him and his will for our lives (Eph. 5:17). It is a serious mistake to say that one can not know God or understand him, as the Bible teaches that we can. Therefore, though we do not fully understand God, still we can come to know in a finite way something of his divine nature, that is his existence as well as his infinite attributes of love, holiness, eternality, justice, etc. This is accomplished by means of both what might be termed natural revelation as well as special revelation, the Bible.

2 Once again, such attributes of God such as these do not fully describe him in a comprehensive way, nor does this brief discussion exhaust these inherent characteristics of the divine nature of God. This is sufficient however to understand what we mean by the God of the Bible as well as to understand our great need in having the Bible to come to know and understand him in a more fuller fashion.

3 C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, **Commentary on the Old Testament. The Pentateuch**, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 410.

4 Edmund Jacob, **Theology Of The Old Testament** (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958), p. 44. The reader would do well to consider the work of Edmond Jacob, as his work

is a helpful one in considering this important Bible concept of God. He deals with these important terms such as El-Elohim, Yahweh, as well as other titles for God.

5 Francis Brown, S. R. Driver & Charles A. Briggs **A Hebrew and English Lexicon of The Old Testament** (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 42-44.

6 O. S. Rankin, Alan Richardson, ed., **A Theological Word Book Of The Bible** (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 94-95. Rankin has an interesting article regarding the term God in the pages of the Bible. Rankin's article is a helpful one when studying this material. He gives thought to the concept of God as it appears in the pages of the Old Testament along with the names of God and includes a good general description of the gods who were worshipped in the land of Canaan. Even though he has given a good bit of precisely stated material on a difficult subject still his approach is more of a liberal one when one looks at the total approach he gives to the material. For a more conservative approach to the subject matter I would suggest Millar Burrows and his **An Outline of Biblical Theology**, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Westminster Press, 1946). Though this volume is somewhat older now it is still one of my favorite works in the area of theology.

7 Rankin, p. 89-99

8 J. D. Douglas, **New Bible Dictionary** 2nd ed., (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1982), p. 430.

9 I have not included in this discussion the many rich figurative expressions, which are given in the Scriptures about God. This discussion has been devoted to the names of God. Such figurative phrases as God is "my rock," or references that refer to God as a "Fortress," "Shield," "Light," "Bread," are descriptive titles given to God. The use of the definite article in many of these instances further establishes the position that they are being used as titles rather than names as such.

CHAPTER 21

WHO IS THE ANGEL OF JEHOVAH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

GARY SUMMERS

ONE OF THE LATEST PASSIONS for Americans is the subject of angels. Not only has there emerged the popular television program, **Touched by an Angel**, but a number of books have glutted the market; many of these contain alleged personal encounters with an angel, which makes for exciting reading. One place in this writer's community will photograph anyone's child in a little more of an angelic pose than normal. Their advertisement says: "Imagine your child floating in the clouds, fully adorned with wings and halo. Capture and feel a little bit of Heaven in this most unique portrait set"—and prices begin at only \$25.00.

There does exist a heavenly host, termed **angels**, and they are God's "ministering spirits"¹ (Heb. 1:14), but lately they have been credited with (or accused of) doing much more than is described in the Word of God. As attractive and talented as some of the female angels on television are, the fact remains that in the Bible angels are always referred to in the masculine gender. No wonder they neither marry nor are given in marriage (Matt. 22:30).

The word **angels**, in the plural, appears twelve times in the Old Testament. The first two of these (Gen. 19:1,

15) refer to the angels who went to Sodom and Gomorrah; the third one involves Jacob's dream, in which they ascended and descended the ladder (28:12); Jacob was also met by "the angels of God" on his return home from Padan Aram, and he named the place **Mahanaim**, which means, "This is God's camp" (Gen. 32:1-2).

The fifth occurrence refers simply to all the angelic host;² it is found in one of Eliphaz' speeches (Job 4:18). Also, in the book of Job the phrase **sons of God** applies to angels (Job 38:7). The other seven passages, in which "angels" are mentioned in the Old Testament, are all found in Psalms.³

However, in this study, angels (in general) are not the focus of attention; rather our concern is the Angel of Jehovah ("the Angel of the Lord," NKJ). Who is He—an archangel or some other exalted spirit-being? Why does He not appear in the New Testament? The thesis of this chapter is that "the Angel of the Lord" is in fact the pre-incarnate Jesus. Our procedure will be to look at the Old Testament Scriptures in which He appears, to notice the way His nature and character are described, to identify which member of the Godhead He could be, and then to consider objections to this explanation.

Appearances Of The Word *Angel* In The Old Testament

Of the 104 times the word **angel** is found in the Old Testament, only 4 of those clearly do not refer to "the Angel of the Lord." The first is Achish assuring David that he knows that he is as "an angel of God" (1 Sam. 29:9). The second involves the old prophet in Bethel who lied to the man of God about an angel of God speaking to him (1 Kings 13:18). The third instance is part of an instruction: "...neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error" (Eccl. 5:6, KJV). The New King James and the New

American Standard both render the word as “messenger” in this verse. The final occurrence finds the Angel of the Lord speaking to another angel (Zech. 2:3).

The other 100 verses in the Old Testament, in which **angel** is found in the singular, are references to “the Angel of the Lord,” although that phrase is not always used. We may likewise read of “the Angel of God,” and in some verses both forms are abbreviated to simply “the angel.” When “the angel” is used, He is defined somewhere in the text.

This “angel” appears 23 times in the book of Judges, primarily in connection with Gideon and then later with Samson’s parents. He is prominent in the book of Zechariah, being mentioned 19 times. In Genesis the reader will find 11 specific references and one allusion; He appears to Hagar, Abraham, and Jacob. The book of Numbers also contains 11 verses involving the angel; all but one of them are in one famous passage describing Balaam’s frustration with his beast of burden who sees what Balaam does not—“the Angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn” (Num. 22:31). “The angel of the Lord” is prominent in 2 Chronicles (9 references) and 2 Samuel (7 references); most of these involve David and the threshing floor of Araunah (or Ornan). The remaining 20 verses in which the angel interacts with men are scattered throughout the Old Testament: Exodus (6), 1 Kings (2), 2 Kings (3), 2 Chronicles (1), Psalms (3), Isaiah (2), Daniel (2), and Hosea (1).

Incidents Involving “The Angel Of The Lord”

The 100 Old Testament references to “the angel of the Lord” are clustered around 15 incidents in which He is mentioned. These will be numbered to facilitate future reference to them.

Hagar is the first person recorded in the Bible who comes in contact with “the angel of the Lord.” He appears to her during two severe trials in her life.

Because of Sarai’s jealousy over Hagar’s pregnancy (and Hagar’s subsequent despising of Sarai), she deals harshly with her handmaid. Hagar flees from Sarai’s presence, but at a spring of water in the wilderness she is met by “the Angel of the Lord” (Gen. 16:7). He instructs her to return and promises her blessings, innumerable descendants—even pronouncing a prophecy concerning her son, whom He commands her to call **Ishmael** (Gen. 16:9-12). The phrase, **the Angel of the Lord**, is used one time each in verses 9, 10, and 11. But notice Hagar’s reaction to what she was told: “Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who Sees...” (Gen. 16:13). What the careful Bible student observes in this verse is typical of the responses made to this Person. Not only does Hagar believe the “angel” is God; the text confirms it by referring to Him as “Lord.” This Individual is one of the members of the Godhead.

Hagar later experiences another crisis situation. Sarah had insisted that Hagar and Ishmael be cast out after the birth of her and Abraham’s long-promised son Isaac. Although Abraham loathes doing such a thing, God assures him it would be all right (Gen. 21:9-14). When their water runs out, Hagar was certain Ishmael was going to die, and she was weeping when “the angel of God” called to her from heaven (Gen. 21:17). In the next verse the voice promises to make Ishmael a great nation. It is significant that the angel did not say God would do it; He said, “I will make Ishmael a great nation.” Who could make such a promise, besides the Lord? In all, then, the Angel of the Lord (or of God) is mentioned in five verses in connection with Hagar (Gen. 16:7-11; 21:17).

Abraham receives a personal visit from the angel of

the Lord on one occasion, is called by Him from heaven on another, and receives help for his servant (in connection with a task that Abraham gave him to perform).

Unfortunately, in the first of these three events, none of the usual expressions is used specifically; they are, however, implied. Moses states that “the Lord” appeared to Abraham by the terebinth trees of Mamre, but in the next verse he sees three “men” (Gen. 18:1-2). Although one of these three **men** is speaking, the text says that “the Lord” asked Abraham why Sarah laughed (Gen. 18:13). Consider the next verse: “Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” When Sarah denies laughing, the Lord insists that she did. But what does the Lord’s appearance as a man have to do with “the Angel of the Lord”? The other two men leave and go to Sodom while the third (the Lord) talks to Abraham (Gen. 18:20-22). Twice these men are called “angels” (Gen. 19:1, 15). It is certainly not a stretch to conclude that “the Lord” (Who appears here in the form of a man, along with two angels) is, in fact, “the Angel of the Lord,” though He is not specifically designated as such here. There is no evidence that more than one member of the Godhead ever appears as a man except the Angel of the Lord. Very shortly we will find another instance in which God is called both “man” and “angel.”

One of the most famous events of Abraham’s life is the test of faith God gives him concerning his only begotten son. It is “the Angel of the Lord” who calls to him from heaven and instructs Abraham not to offer his son as a sacrifice (Gen. 22:11-12). The Angel of the Lord (Gen. 22:15) calls to Abraham a second time and speaks thus: “By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord,” and then He pronounces blessings upon Abraham (Gen. 22:16-18). This occasion is cited in the New Testament “For when God

made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself”(Heb. 6:13). What else can be concluded but that the Angel of the Lord is Deity?

When it was time for Isaac to have a wife, Abraham wants to be sure that he did not marry one of the daughters of the Canaanites; so he sends his servant back to his country and kindred to find a woman. He promises the servant that God will send “His angel” before him (Gen. 24:7). Later the servant repeats his instructions to Laban and Bethuel (Gen. 24:40), who allow Rebekah to return with him. There is only one Angel Abraham could have meant—the Angel of the Lord. Otherwise, he surely would have said that God would send **one** of His angels rather than “His angel.”

Jacob has two very unusual contacts with the Angel of the Lord; at the end of his life he makes an important observation about Him.

A little background is necessary in order to see the significance of Jacob’s speech to his wives in Genesis 31. Because of Esau’s determination to kill Jacob, he fled, spending a night in a place he called Bethel. It was there that he dreamed of the ladder, which the angels ascended and descended (Gen. 28:12). At that time God repeated the promises made to Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 28:13-15). In return for God’s blessings and a safe return, Jacob vowed to return to God a tenth (Gen. 28:22). When Jacob, after twenty years of serving Laban, decides to depart from him, he first convinces his wives of the necessity of leaving by telling them that God had commanded him to do so. He tells them “the Angel of God” spoke to him in a dream, saying, “I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your kindred” (Gen. 31:11-12). Again, it is noteworthy that the Angel of God is the God of Bethel.

Jacob's second experience begins with him wrestling with a Man (Gen. 32:22-32). This One Who had the appearance of a man was actually God—at least Jacob so believed, for he called the place Peniel, because (in his words) “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (Gen. 32:30). The word **angel** does not appear in this entire passage; additional information was not recorded for over a thousand years—when a prophet informed everyone that “in his strength” Jacob “struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed” (Hos. 12:3b-4a). Just as in the case of the three that came to Abraham (they were angels that appeared as men, and one of them was “the Angel of the Lord”), so here “the Angel” appeared as a man and wrestled with Jacob.

Near the end of his life Jacob blesses Joseph. Then he calls upon God to bless Joseph's two sons. How he does so is a bit unusual: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads” (Gen. 48:15-16a). Once again, it is obvious that “the Angel” is God. Thus, Genesis contains 11 specific references to “the Angel,” “the Angel of God,” or “the Angel of the Lord” (as well as the two occasions in which this Angel is implied).

Moses sees a great sight—a bush burning with fire (without being consumed). It is “the Angel of the Lord” who appears “to him in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush” (Exod. 3:2). However, we read: “So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush” (Exod. 3:4). Either the bush was getting awfully crowded, or the terms **the Lord, God,** and **the Angel of the Lord** all refer to the same Person. When Moses asks His name, He identifies Himself as “I AM WHO I AM” or simply “I AM” (Exod. 3:14). In the New Testament Jesus presents Himself as “I AM” in John

8:58, for which the Jews wanted to stone Him (John 8:59). In his last sermon, Stephen mentions this event: “And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai” (Acts 7:30). As Moses draws closer, it is “the voice of the Lord” that he hears (Acts 7:31). This voice identifies Himself as the God of his fathers and instructs him to remove his sandals because he is standing on holy ground (Acts 7:32-33). Notice that Stephen then says that Moses was “the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush” (Acts 7:35). “The Angel of the Lord” is “the God of Abraham” is “the Angel.” Now consider Acts 7:38. The Angel speaks to Moses on Mount Sinai **and** with the fathers. There is only one occasion when a voice from heaven spoke to Moses and the people at Mount Sinai—when the law was given. These “living oracles” are also mentioned in verse 38. It is the Angel, who is God, who spoke these things at that time (Exod. 20:1-19).

The Leader of Israel, Who delivered Israel out of Egypt and to the promised land, is also the Angel of the Lord:

And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them (Exod. 14:19).⁵

In the other four passages in Exodus, the Angel of the Lord is portrayed as the One Who would: (1) keep Israel in the way and bring them into the place God had prepared (Exod. 23:20); (2) go before them and bring them “in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites,” all of whom

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He would cut off (Exod. 23:23); (3) go before Moses, so that he could lead Israel to the land (Exod. 32:24); and (4) drive out the inhabitants of the land (Exod. 33:2). The Angel's role in their deliverance from Egypt is not mentioned until Numbers 20:16a: "When we cried out to the Lord, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt." This fact is mentioned again in Judges 2:1a: "Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: 'I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers.'" The phrase, **the Angel of the Lord**, is mentioned once more at the close of His remarks (Judg. 2:4). A final reference to God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt is made by Isaiah:

In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old (63:9).

In all, 9 verses from 4 books mention the Angel's leadership.

Balaam is confronted by the Angel of the Lord on his way to earn money, which he would enjoy for only a brief time. The Angel is mentioned one time each in Numbers 22:22-27; 31-32, and 34-35, for a total of ten times. Another indication that the Angel of the Lord is one of the Godhead is seen by the fact that the Angel of the Lord told Balaam: "Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that shall you speak" (Num. 22:35). Yet When Balak is dissatisfied with Balaam's speech, Balaam answers: "Must I not take heed to speak what the Lord has put in my mouth?" (Num. 23:12). Both the Angel of the Lord and the Lord are credited with putting the words into Balaam's mouth.

Deborah and Barak sing a victory song, in which the following information is provided: “Curse Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, ‘curse its inhabitants bitterly, because they did not come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty,’” (Judg. 5:23). This conversation is not recorded elsewhere, nor is any specified contact that Deborah and Barak had with the Angel of the Lord. If not for this song, we would have no knowledge of their familiarity with Him.

Gideon, however, has a lengthy conversation with this Divine Personage in Judges 6:11-23. It is the Angel of the Lord who sits under the terebinth tree (v. 11) and appears to Gideon, saying, “The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!” (v. 12). However, after Gideon asks a question, it is “the Lord” who answers him (v. 14). The Lord also says, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man” (v. 16). However, when Gideon presents Him with an offering, it is “the Angel of God” Who gives him instructions for the correct method of offering the meat, the unleavened, bread, and the broth (v. 20). The phrase, **the Angel of the Lord**, is then used four times in the next two verses. When Gideon says, “Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face,” (v.22), it is then the Lord Who responds by saying, “Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die” (v. 23). The reader cannot help noticing that the Angel of the Lord (mentioned a total of seven times) and the Lord are used interchangeably in this passage.

Samson’s parents also have a conversation with the Angel of the Lord (mentioned 13 times), and they likewise offer a sacrifice. This entire event occurs in Judges 13, beginning with the Angel of the Lord speaking to Manoah’s wife (v. 3). He tells her that she shall give birth to a son (v. 3), who will be a Nazarite. When she relays this message to Manoah, she says: “A Man of God came to me,

and his countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome” (v. 6). Manoah prays for the Man of God to return, and the Angel of God appears again to the woman (v. 9), who runs and gets her husband. The Angel of the Lord speaks to Manoah (v. 13), and in turn he begs the Angel of the Lord to stay and accept an offering (v. 15). The Angel of the Lord is mentioned specifically twice in verses 16 and 21 and once each in verses 17-21 (although the reference in verse 19 is in italics in the KJV and is replaced by **He** in the NKJV). At first, Manoah does not know that the “man” to whom he is speaking is the Angel of the Lord, but he realizes it after He ascends toward heaven in the flame of the altar. Manoah thinks, “We shall surely die, because we have seen God!” (v. 22). How Manoah knew the identity of the Angel of the Lord is not explained, but it is not uncommon knowledge in the Old Testament.

David first of all is compared to the Angel of the Lord; then he sees Him in action; finally, he mentions Him in two of His psalms.

On two separate occasions King David is likened to the Angel of the Lord. The first of these involves the woman from Tekoa whom Joab persuaded to talk to David about bringing Absalom back to Jerusalem after he had killed Amnon. She comments: “For as the angel of God, so is my lord the king in discerning good and evil” (2 Sam. 14:17). She also says: “My lord is wise, according to the wisdom of the angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth” (2 Sam. 14:20). Who else could possess these qualities but God? Mephibosheth is the other person who says to David that Ziba “slandered your servant to my lord the king, but my lord the king is like the angel of God. Therefore do what is good in your eyes” (2 Sam. 19:27). Mephibosheth likewise seems to be acknowledging the wisdom and discernment of the Angel of God, as well

as his capability of executing righteous judgment.

David sees the Angel of the Lord at the threshing floor of Araunah (Ornan). Two books of the Old Testament describe this sad event, in which David chooses his own punishment for his sin. The account in 2 Samuel refers to the Angel of the Lord only one time by that designation; the other three times He is simply called “the angel” (24:16-17). In 1 Chronicles the punishment is described as being a plague in the land for three days, in which “the angel of the Lord” would destroy “throughout all the territory of Israel” by means of “the sword of the Lord” (21:12). David refers to this punishment as falling “into the hand of the Lord” (21:13). Many lives are lost during these three days, and “God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it,” but then relented and gave the order to restrain His hand. “And the angel of the Lord stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite” (21:15). David sees “the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem” (v. 16). The Angel of the Lord commands David to build an altar (v. 18). Ornan also sees “the angel” (v. 20). After the offering, “the Lord commanded the angel, and he returned his sword to its sheath” (27). This incident concludes with the comment that David “was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord” (v. 30). This incident shows us that God can and does bring judgment upon a nation because of the sins of its ruler. Although this same destroying Angel is not mentioned in connection with Egypt, nevertheless “the Lord killed all the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animal” (Exod. 13:15). In our age of fixation upon God’s grace, we would do well to balance the Biblical teaching of grace with the fact of His judgment upon the ungodly.

David writes about the Angel of the Lord with a different perspective in Psalms 34:7: “And the angel of

the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.” Certainly, David had sufficient firsthand experience in being pursued. He had been preserved, protected, and delivered. The opposite side of this thought is his wish to unleash the Angel’s destructive power upon his enemies. Let them be like chaff before the wind, and let the angel of the Lord chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery, and let the angel of the Lord pursue them (Psm. 35:5-6). These three verses are the only references to the Angel of the Lord (by that name) found in Psalms.

Elijah has contact with God’s Messenger on two occasions. In 1 Kings 19:5 and 7, “the angel of the Lord” touches the prophet twice and tells him to eat so that he may be prepared for his journey. This admonition follows his flight from Jezebel, who had threatened his life, thus causing great discouragement to Elijah. The evil queen had rejected the evidence of God’s power, as witnessed by her husband Ahab, which suggests she would have been comfortable among those who in Jesus’ day were guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:22-32).

In 2 Kings 1:3 the Angel of the Lord gives Elijah a prophecy to deliver to the messengers of Ahaziah, the king of Samaria. He is chastised for forsaking Jehovah and told that he will not recover from his illness. The king demands to see him in person and sends successive companies of soldiers to bring him. The first two captains with their fifty men were consumed by fire from heaven. The third captain is very humble and entreated the prophet for his life and the life of his men. Is it a trick? The “angel of the Lord” assures Elijah that he need not fear this man (2 Kings 1:15). When the prophet sees the king, he gives him precisely the same message that he had previously conveyed to him from a distance. As with Balaam, the Angel of the Lord provides Elijah the very

words he is to speak.

Sennacherib boasts of his various conquests over other nations and assures Jerusalem that she would not be able to stand against him, either. He refuses to speak only to King Hezekiah; he made sure that his message was proclaimed in the hearing of all the people so they would put pressure on the king to surrender. To their credit, the people hearken to Hezekiah and remain faithful to God, who then sends the Angel of the Lord to kill 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35; Isa. 37:36). The writer of 2 Chronicles only mentions “an angel,” but since the same event is being reported as in the other two accounts, he is obviously referring to the same Individual.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego are thrown into the fiery furnace as punishment for refusing to worship the gold image of King Nebuchadnezzar. The king, however, observes another with them. “‘Look!’ he answered, ‘I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God’” (Dan. 3:25). How did this king know to say such a thing? Had Daniel been discussing such matters with him? But the king has not finished; he adds: “‘Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who sent His Angel and delivered his servants who trusted in Him’” (Dan. 3:28a). Although it seems incredible for a pagan king to so speak, it must have been Daniel’s evangelistic spirit that imparted such knowledge to the one who was holding Judah captive.

Daniel himself is the target of his jealous enemies, who had (by trickery) forced the king into putting the righteous prophet into a den of lions for violating a royal edict. When the king asks if Daniel was all right after his evening with the lions, he responds: “‘O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths...’” (Dan. 6:21b-22a). The prophet does not hesitate

to state the source of his protection; he takes advantage of every opportunity to glorify God.⁶

Zechariah the prophet has a great deal of involvement with One who is sometimes called “the Angel of the Lord” (Zech. 1:11-12) and more frequently “the angel who talked with me” (Zech. 1:9, 13, 14, 19; 2:3). The longer phrase, **the Angel of the Lord**, is used in Zechariah 3:1-5 and 6, but “the Angel” appears in verse 3. Most of the remaining references use “the angel who talked with me” (4:1-5; 5:5-10; 6:4). Zechariah 6:5 mentions only “the angel,” and the concluding reference is once again “the Angel of the Lord” (Zech. 12:8). In all, He is referred to 19 times in this prophetic book.

Our look at the references to “the Angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament is now complete. As stated previously, there are only 4 times in the Old Testament when **angel** in the singular does **not** refer to the Angel of Jehovah; the other 100 (out of 104) do. We have already seen how He is equated with the Lord in a number of ways; He even puts words in the mouths of prophets, all of which forces us to ask the question:

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Whoever He is, He is not mentioned by this designation in the New Testament. To be sure, the phrase remains (at least in the KJV; the NKJV usually uses **an angel**), but when examined in the context, these angels are not on the same level as “the Angel of the Lord.” There are no attributes of Deity ascribed to them, and none of them is used interchangeably with “the Lord,” as in so many of the Old Testament passages.

In an effort to identify the Angel of the Lord, it would be helpful to review the information occasionally noticed in our survey of Old Testament Scriptures.

Names reflect the Angel’s visit with human beings.

After Jacob wrestled with the “angel,” for example, he used an **el** in the name he gave to that place (**Peniel**, meaning “the face of God”); *el* is the Hebrew (singular) word translated “God.” The “man” with whom Jacob wrestled changed Jacob’s name to **Israel** because he had “struggled with God” and prevailed (Gen. 32:28).

In some texts the Lord and the Angel of the Lord are the same individual. Not only do people such as Hagar draw such a conclusion (Gen. 16:13; 32:30), but even the inspired writer refers to the Speaker in both ways (Gen. 16:11-13).

The angel of the Lord prophesies, which is no proof of Deity, since both angels and men can do so when God gives them a message. But the Angel of the Lord says things that can be attributed to God alone. In Genesis 22:15-16 He even swears by Himself because, as Hebrews 6:13 adds, He could swear by no one greater. If this were a typical angel, He could swear by someone greater—namely God, but He cannot do so because He **is** God. In a dream, the Angel of God tells Jacob, “I am the God of Bethel” (Gen. 31:11-13). The Angel of the Lord appears to Moses in a flame of fire from the burning bush and tells him, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” (Exod. 3:3-6). Only God can make the claims that this Angel makes.⁷

The Angel has the ability to put the words of God in the mouths of his prophets. In Numbers 22:35 the Angel of the Lord cautions Balaam: “Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that shall you speak.” But when criticized for doing exactly that by Balak who had hired him to curse Israel, the prophet answers: “Must I not take heed to speak what the Lord has put in my mouth?” (Num. 23:12). The force of the point cannot be missed: The Angel of the Lord is as much Deity as the Lord is.

Characteristics of Deity are ascribed by others to the

Angel of the Lord. He can “discern good and evil” (2 Sam. 14:17), displays the very highest wisdom (2 Sam. 14:20), and knows what is appropriate to do, which implies that He can do no wrong (2 Sam. 19:27).

No angel in the New Testament claims even one of the five characteristics mentioned above; neither does anyone else ascribe such attributes to them. The reason the Angel of the Lord is absent in the New Testament is that He became flesh (John 1:14). He did not just appear as a man; He became a man (Phil. 2:5-8). The Christ was not idle throughout the Old Testament era; He was performing the will of the Father then, too—as the Angel of the Lord.

But how do we know the Angel of the Lord was specifically the pre-incarnate Word (John 1:1-2)? One way that conclusion can be drawn is by the process of elimination. The Father is always the One Who originates the plans; Christ implements them, and the Holy Spirit provides the power. This is the view that most theologians hold, whether in or out of the Lord’s church. In the New Testament, for example, Jesus makes it clear: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). He also affirms that He did not originate His teaching: “For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak” (John 12:49). When He promised to send the Holy Spirit, he informed the disciples that “He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak” (John 16:12-13). So, although the three personalities in the Godhead are equal, the Father exercises the leadership role, determining what is to be said and done; Jesus and the Holy Spirit put those plans into operation.

One of these latter two must, therefore, be the Angel of the Lord. But there is no evidence that speaking or

appearing to men has ever been the work of the Spirit. Certainly it was, however, necessary for Jesus to appear to men and talk with them in the New Testament. He is even defined as “the Word” in John 1:1. The Spirit is the power behind the miracles (Matt. 12:22-32; Acts 1:8), and He inspired the Scriptures to be written or spoken (2 Tim. 3:16-17). But there is no reason to think He ever made an appearance to men or talked with them.

Jesus, then, is the only one of the Godhead whose role in doing the Father’s bidding in the New Testament is consistent with the work of the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament. Remember also that Jesus identifies Himself as the One who spoke to Moses in the burning bush, when He said, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58).

Objections

Two objections might be raised against this interpretation. The first is that there is no specific confirmation in the New Testament that Jesus is the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament (although there is John 8:58). While a flat-out admission would be helpful, it is not needful. One of the beauties of delving into the Word of God is discovering truths that are implied, though not stated plainly. God could have made many things more clear (salvation, for example), so that even a casual glance could discern the information we need to know. But what would be the challenge? Where would be the blessing that comes from diligently seeking Him? Rather than being bored by too much simplicity, we are provoked into searching the Scriptures. (Besides, the clearest statements that God has ever made have been denied by godless men anyway; thus, there is no apparent advantage in severe simplicity.)

The other objection would be that Jesus is called an “angel,” which is a created being. Therefore, He ends up

being downgraded from the Godhead that He possesses. This point is less than valid since great caution has been exercised to demonstrate that “the Angel of the Lord” is Divine. He is God; He is identified as “the Lord” in many of the texts we examined.

But why is He referred to in a way that might confuse some? Endnote 3 explains that the Hebrew word translated “angel” is also translated “messenger.” It is this idea that is being communicated to the Bible student. Jesus always does the Father’s will; so He is God, but He is also the Messenger of God. When God has something to say to man, He often chooses to send His Messenger to say it. If He wants a particular task performed (leading Israel through the wilderness, conquering the land, protecting His people from the Assyrians), He can send His Messenger to take care of matters.

The final matter for Jesus to take care of was the procurement of salvation from our sins. Happily, Jesus has faithfully accomplished every task that the Father has given Him—including the shedding of His blood on the cross for our sins. May our knowledge of His work both in the Old and New Testament periods serve only to increase our admiration of Him and our determination to be like Him. As much as lies within us, may we too display the attitude of a willing servant.

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations will be from the New King James Version unless otherwise specified, but the number of times a word appears in the Old Testament is based on the King James Version and **Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible**.

2 Angels are sometimes described as “all the host of heaven” (1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 18:18), “all their host,” or “the host of heaven” (Neh. 9:6). The angels who sinned are also

referred to as “the host of exalted ones” (Isa. 24:21), whom the Lord will punish. The reader should not assume that “the host” always describes angels; the same phrase is used of the physical creation (Gen. 2:1).

3 Only one of these seven is just a general mention of angels (Psm. 148:2). Each of the others provides a little information about them. David writes in Psalms 103:20: “Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word.” The next verse is parallel to this one: “Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure.” Apparently, part of His pleasure was sending “angels of destruction” among the Egyptians (Psm. 78:49). Then there are Psalms 91:11, which Satan cited to Jesus: “For He shall give His angels charge over you,” and Psalms 104:4, which is quoted in Hebrews 1:7: “Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire.” Psalms 68:17 (KJV) begins: “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels” (the NKJV has “thousands of thousands,” as do the NASB and the NIV). The Hebrew word used in Psalms 68:17 is a different word from the usual [8136 in **Strong’s**]; its root meaning is “to alter or change” [8132]. The Hebrew word translated “thousands” [505] is not at all related to “angels,” and the word translated “angels” is not at all related to “thousands.” In this case the KJV may have the best rendering; would it be a stretch to think that the chariots of God are angels (2 Kings 6:17)? The seventh appearance of “angels” is in Psalms 8:5: “For You have made Him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned Him with glory and honor.” The usual word translated “angel” is **mal awk’** (**Strong’s** 4397). [It is also translated “messenger” (singular 24 times, plural 74 times) when referring to human beings.] But the word in Psalms 8:5 is *Elohim* (430), literally “gods.” Using “angels” in Psalms 8:5, however, is permissible, since it is the Greek word selected in Hebrews 2:7 for “gods.” Also, why could angels not be referred to as “gods,” if men can be so termed (see Psm. 82:1, 6; John 10:34-36)?

4 Many manuscripts omit **of the Lord** and just speak of the “angel.”

5 Exodus 14:19 could be a Hebrew parallelism, meaning that the Angel of the Lord and the pillar of cloud are synonymous.

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An interesting addition to this event occurs the next morning: “Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians” (Exod. 14:24). Despite the fact that the glory of the Lord occasionally appears to Israel in the cloud (Exod. 16:10), the indication is that His presence is always there: “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night” (Exod. 13:21). In Moses’ historical summary of Israel’s recent history for the new generation, he says: “Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God, who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day” (Deut. 1:32-33). We see, then, that the Angel of the Lord goes before Israel, but so does the Lord in the cloud and in the fire. Moses, when pleading for God not to destroy Israel, says the Egyptians will hear of it and tell it to the inhabitants of the land. “They have heard that You, Lord, are among these people; that You, Lord, are seen face to face and that Your cloud stands above them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night” (Exod. 14:13-14). One of the writers of the Psalms commented: “He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar” (99:7a). The Angel of the Lord, or the Lord, seems to be continually in the pillar of cloud and fire; He looks through it and speaks from it. The reader may be reminded of Matthew 17:5: “While he was speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

6 The word translated “angel” in these two verses in Daniel is a Chaldean variation [4398] of the Hebrew word [4397].

7 Along these lines, it should be observed that Jesus is also “the Commander of the Army of the Lord” in Joshua 5:13-15. Joshua sees “a Man” with “His sword drawn in his hand” (v. 13), which is not unlike what David witnessed at the threshing floor of Ornan. Joshua worships Him (v. 14), which the Man (unlike Peter in Acts 10:25-26 or the angel in Revelation 22:8-9) does not discourage. In fact, He tells Joshua, “Take your sandal

off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy” (v. 15). This individual can only be Deity; these words cannot fail to remind us of what was said to Moses in the burning bush (by the Angel of the Lord). God fought for His people not only in conquering the land, but also later when He took care of the Assyrians. Jesus is the Commander of the Lord’s army. Notice also that the manna ceased just prior to the Commander’s appearance to Joshua (Josh. 5:12). Presumably, now that Israel had crossed the Jordan into the promised land, the pillar of cloud and fire was no longer needed.

CHAPTER 22

HOW TO ANSWER
THE ARGUMENTS OF
ONENESS PENTECOSTALS

BILLY BLAND

Introduction

A *STUDY OF THE FATHER*, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is indeed a profitable and essential study. Sadly, many are unacquainted with their Creator. While one can know there is a God (the first great cause), by observing the creation (Psm. 19:1-6, Rom. 1:20), he can only know the nature and the will of God through a study of God's word (I Cor. 2:11). God has revealed Himself within the pages of Holy Writ and they alone serve as a trustworthy and reliable source of information relative to His nature.

The subject at hand is, "How to Answer the Arguments of the Oneness Pentecostals." The Oneness Pentecostals teach there is only one person in the Godhead, namely Jesus Christ. Consequently, they baptize their disciples using the phrase "in the name of Jesus Christ." They will not, when baptizing, repeat the phrase, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). How and when did they reach such a conclusion?

In the year 1914 come the revelation of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The pivotal doctrine

of the absolute deity of Jesus Christ and baptism in His name became tenants of faith.¹

So states the Pentecostal Manual.

Is it not strange that the Pentecostals had to obtain this information by a direct revelation in 1914, as opposed to learning such from the pages of the Bible? Their manual continues:

The power which was hidden in the name of Jesus began to be revealed. Literally thousands were rebaptized into the name of Jesus Christ, and multitudes received the baptism of the Holy Spirit while in the water.²

Regarding themselves, the United Pentecostal Church International affirms:

The UPCI emerged out of the Pentecostal movement that began in Topeka, Kansas in 1901. It traces its organizational roots to October 1916, when a large group of ministers withdrew from the Assemblies of God over the doctrinal issues of the oneness of God and water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.³

They further affirm:

In distinction to the doctrine of the Trinity, the UPCI, holds to a oneness view of God. It views the Trinitarian concept of God, that of God eternally existing as three distinctive persons, as inadequate and the departure from the consistent and emphatic Biblical revelation of God being one.⁴

Having noted the beginning and the doctrine of the

Godhead relative to the “Oneness Pentecostals,” attention is now directed to some of their major arguments and their answers.

Argument number one: “The Bible teaches there is only **one** God.” There are many passages that affirm there is only one God. Moses wrote, “Hear, O Israel the Lord our God is one Lord.” Peter states, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God had made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Therefore, Jesus is Lord and since there is only one Lord, there cannot be two other persons in the Godhead, (according to the Oneness Pentecostals).

Reply: First, one should realize that the word “God” denotes “Deity” and not number. There is only one divine nature. The word “God,” doesn’t mean “one,” but Deity. In other words, the term “God itself doesn’t tell one how many persons possess this divine nature. There is, in fact, one divine nature, but three persons who possess this one divine nature. The Scriptures affirm God, the Father (John 3:16), God, the Son (Heb. 1:8), and God, the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4).

But, what about the Bible’s teaching of “one” God? How can there be God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Ghost and still be just one God?

The phrase, “one God” does not mean there is only one person that possesses the nature of God. The word translated “one” is from the Hebrew word “echad.” Echad is “a numeral having the power of an adjective, and signifying, to unite, to join oneself together.”⁵

Man and wife are “one flesh”(echad) (Gen. 2:24). Here are two persons said to be “one.” Obviously they are not one person, but are said to one in the sense of union or unity.

Pharaoh had two dreams relative to a coming

drought. In Joseph's interpretation of the dreams he affirms, "The dream of Pharaoh is one" (*echad*) (Gen. 41:25-26). Many spoke with "one mouth" (*echad*) (1 Kings 22:13). Several people had "one heart" (*echad*) (Ezek. 11:19).⁶

This same word (*echad*) describes Deity (God) in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord," and in Zechariah 14:9, "in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one." Likewise, Malachi asked, "Hath not one God created us?" (Mal. 2:10). The word "God is a compound unity not an absolute one."⁷

In contrast to the Hebrew word, "*echad*," a word signifying a compound unity, the word, "*yachid*" (one), which signified absolute unity is never used of God. It does describe such things as an "only son" (Gen. 22:2; Jer. 6:26; Judg. 11:34).⁸

Let us remember, "The word God is the name of the Divine Nature. There is but one Divine Nature, therefore, there is but one God. Three persons possess this one Divine Nature: the Father (John 3:16), the Son (John 1:1), the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4)."⁹

Argument number two: "One is to be baptized in the name of Jesus."

In "The Jackson - Bayer Debate on Pentecostalism", Mr. R. E. Bayer affirmed:

The Scriptures teach that water baptism was administered by the apostles in the New Testament church to the penitent believer, only in the name of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Book of Acts, and is not scriptural if administered using the words; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

Pentecostal debaters affirm that Matthew 28:19 tells

us to baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and that the terms “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” are not names. The name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is Jesus, they assert. From the Internet, we find the following statement:

Jesus commanded His disciples to “Teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). He did not command them to use these words as a formula, but He commanded them to baptize in “the name.” The word **name** is used here in the singular, and it is the focal point of the baptismal command. The titles Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost describe God’s relationships to humanity and are not the supreme, caving (sic) name described here, which is Jesus. “Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must by saved” (Acts 4:12).¹¹

From all of this, it is affirmed that we must utter the name of Jesus when baptizing someone. In the “Wallace - Vaughn Debate,” Mr. Vaughn correctly affirmed that we must do all in the name of Jesus. He, however, incorrectly affirmed that we must say the name of Jesus when we baptize. Brother G.K. Wallace showed Vaughn’s position to be ridiculous:

“There’s no other name,” says Vaughn.

Wallace: Where’d you get Pentecostal Holiness? Where did you get United Pentecostal Holiness?”

Vaughn: Silence.

He made a big play on “everything is to be done in the name of Christ.” Then he goes around doing everything in the name of the Pentecostal

Holiness church. (At this point there was loud laughter at Vaughn's table by Vaughn, waters and Bradford.)

Wallace: "You can't laugh that off. And you can't explain it."¹²

Reply: What about baptizing people "in the name of Jesus" and not using the phrase "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost?" To baptize one in the name of Jesus Christ is to baptize one by the authority of Christ. Never are we told what the apostles **said** when they baptized one, rather we are informed what they **did!** A close study of the book of Acts will reveal that the apostles baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ"- *epi too onomati* (Acts 2:38), "in the name of the Lord Jesus - *eis to onoma* (Acts 8:16; 19:5) "in the name of the Lord" - *en too onomati* (Acts 10:48). Here are three variations from the Book of Acts, which of course, reveal there was no exact formula of what was said, but rather what was done. Regarding these phrases, Mr. Thayer states:

Epi to onomati : **upon** the name: Relying upon the name, i.e. the authority.

Eis to onoma: **into** the name: to possess the name of the one whose follower we become.

En too onomati: **by** the name: By one's command or authority.¹³

We are scripturally baptized upon the name of Christ, to possess His name, and by His command or authority. Now, what has He commanded? To be baptized into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost (Matt. 20:19). How can it be sinful to utter what Jesus has commanded us to do?!

We recognize (and honor) that the name of the second person of the Godhead is "Jesus." However, according to

the Bible, this is not His only name. Note the following:

1. “His name is called **Jesus**” (Luke 2:21).
2. “His name is called **The Word of God**” (Rev. 19:13).
3. “A name written, **King of Kings, and Lord of Lords**” (Rev. 19:16).
4. “They shall call His name **Immanuel**.” (Matt. 1:23)
5. His name shall be called: Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).¹⁴

There are various titles or names by which Jesus is known. If the Oneness Pentecostals had relied upon the Scriptures rather than a so-called “revelation” that supposedly came in 1914, they would not have adopted such an erroneous view. Imagine one using the very words of Jesus (Matt. 28:19) when baptizing a person and being condemned for such! The Word of God is telling us what to **do** in baptizing penitent believers, it is not telling us what to **say**. The Oneness Pentecostals cannot produce one scripture that tells us what the apostles said when they baptized!

It is strange that one would attempt to use Matthew 28:19 to say there is only one person in the Godhead, when the very verse he is using is proof against him. Notice the text does not say, “the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost.” It does say “**The** Father, and **the** Son, and **the** Holy Ghost.” The definite article “the” is used with each person of the Godhead. This clearly reveals each person as distinct from the other! The Father is not the Son nor the Holy Ghost. The Son is not the Father nor the Holy Ghost. And, the Holy Ghost is not the Father nor the Son. Each one is distinct from the other.

It is sometimes argued that a man can be a father and also be a son at the same time. This is true. However, the analogy is not true. A man is not his own father! Neither is he his own son! If a man has a father, that reveals two persons. The same is true if he has a son. This ridiculous argument has Jesus being his own father and yet at the same time being his own son.¹⁵

Jesus Christ did not believe in the Oneness Pentecostal doctrine of the Godhead, for He affirmed He had a Father! He stated He would “go to the Father” (John 14:12), and His Father is greater than He (John 14:28)! How could this be true, if there was only one person in the Godhead. Likewise, the Father doesn’t believe in the Oneness Pentecostal doctrine of the Godhead for He declared, “Thou art my Son,” (Heb. 1:5) and “I will be to him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son,” and “unto the Son He saith, thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever” (Heb. 1:8). These passages clearly reveal more than one person in the Godhead.

Argument number three - “There is no God before me, nor after me.” Oneness Pentecostals will (mis) use Isaiah 43 to teach only one person in the Godhead. God through Isaiah states:

Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen. That ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.” (Isa. 43:10).

From this they assume there is only one person in the Godhead.

Reply: Again, one must remember that the word God denotes Divine Nature. The text does not say there

is only one person in the Godhead. If so, where does it state such? No one affirms that there was a God before God! The context is dealing with idols (cf. Isa. 43:12). God is affirming that there is no true God, other than Him. God is contrasting Himself with the idols of Isaiah’s day.

Argument number four - Beside the Lord there is no Savior. God says, “I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no savior” (Isa. 43:11) Since Jesus is the savior (Matt. 1:21), and the Lord affirms that there is no savior beside Him, they affirm that there is no other person in the Godhead other than Jesus.¹⁶

Reply: God is contrasting himself with the idols of Isaiah’s day. They could not save. Only He could deliver them. This is not teaching one person in the Godhead.

Argument number five: Since Jesus Christ is the first and the last, then He cannot be the second person of the Godhead (Isa. 44:6, etc).

Reply: Jesus is often called the first and the last (cf. Isa. 44:6, Rev. 1:8, 17). These passages simply affirm the Deity of Jesus. Again, God is contrasted with idols in the Isaiah passage and Jesus is affirming His Deity in the other references.

Argument number six: God was manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). The apostle Paul wrote:

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:16).

Mr. Vaughn took this passage and then combined it

with John 4:24 (worshipping God in truth), then added John 14:6 (Jesus is the truth), and then stated, “The only way you and I will ever worship God is in Christ.”¹⁷

Reply: This “argument” reveals how far some will go to try to maintain a false doctrine. The argument assumes that since God was “manifest” in Christ, that God and Jesus must be the same person. However, Christ was manifest by Paul, according to 2 Cor. 4:10 and 14. Does this prove that Paul is Christ? Too much proves too little. Paul manifest Christ but they are not the same person. 1 Timothy 3:16 does not teach one person in the Godhead. God was manifest in Christ, but this does not prove that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are the same person.

Argument number seven: Jesus declared that He and the Father are “one,” therefore they are the same person.

Reply: John 10:30 states, “I and the Father are one.” There is a vast difference in saying we are “one” and saying we are “one person.” Husband and wife are one (Matt. 19:5), yet they are not the same person. “God and Christ are one in doctrine but not in person”¹⁸ (2 John 9).

The followers of Christ are to be one. Jesus prayed “that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21). Did the reader catch the force of this verse? “**All**” of the followers of Jesus are to be “**one**” as the Father and me the Son are “one.” Now, if the Father and the Son are one person, then all the disciples of Jesus are to be one person! It is obvious that all the disciples are not one in person, but in purpose! Consequently the Father and the Son are not one in person, but in purpose!

John affirms that not only is Jesus God, but he was

with God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). Later John identifies the Word to be the Christ (John 1:14). Note carefully that the Word was God and He also was **with God**. This again clearly reveals more than one person in the Godhead.

Argument number eight: “Acts 20:28 states that God shed His blood for the Church. I thought Jesus shed His blood?”¹⁹

Reply: In reality, this is no argument at all. This verse simply proves that Jesus is God. No one who believes in three separate persons in the Godhead denies that Jesus is God.

But, it is interesting to note that the Father did not shed blood. Neither did the Holy Spirit shed blood. It was Jesus Christ who shed His blood, again proving more than one person in the Godhead!

Argument number nine: In Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Since all the fullness of the Godhead bodily is in Jesus, then there are no more persons in the Godhead other than Jesus.

Reply: John wrote, “And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Are we Christ, because we have His fullness? We have the fullness of God but we are not God! This verse (Col. 2:9) is affirming that Christ is not lacking in the quality of Godhood. All the fullness of the Godhead (Godhood) dwelt bodily in Jesus Christ. Paul is refuting the various erroneous philosophies (such as early Gnosticism), which affirmed that the flesh was the seat of sin. According to these false philosophies, God could not have come in the flesh, since according to them, the flesh was evil. Paul refutes such by affirming that Christ was not lacking in any quality of the Godhead.

Argument number ten: Since we are complete in Christ, why do we need three?

Reply: We are complete in Christ. The “Colossian Heresy” presented Christ as an inadequate Savior, whereas the Scriptures affirm we are complete in Him (Col. 2:10).

By such “arguments” are the Oneness Pentecostals affirming they do not need the Father nor the Holy Spirit? Imagine - a Pentecostal who doesn’t claim the Holy Spirit?!

Argument number eleven: He that hath seen the Christ has seen the Father. (John 14:9). Philip wanted to see the Father (John 14:8). Jesus replied:

Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father: and how sayest thou then, show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works (John 14:9-10).

From this the Pentecostals erroneously conclude that Christ is the Father.

Reply: It is not uncommon to see a father in his son. The very text just cited states “he that hath seen **me** hath seen **the Father**.” There are two persons mentioned in this text, one could see the Father by looking at the Son. They, however, are not the same person. If I were to say that my father is in me, one would easily understand there are two persons mentioned, one, “my father”, and two, “me.” Such is also the case with John 14:9.

Argument number twelve: Isaiah refers to Christ in prophecy as “The everlasting Father.” According to the Oneness Pentecostals this proves that God the Father is Jesus.

Reply: Isaiah not only refers to Christ as the “everlasting Father,” but also as “wonderful,” “counsellor,” “the mighty God,” and “the prince of Peace.” These are titles or names in reference to Christ, yet the Oneness Pentecostals single out the name “Jesus” as though that is His only name and demand that one utter that name when he baptizes. They had better stay away from Isaiah 9:6 if they still want to affirm “Jesus” is the only name.

The everlasting Father doesn’t affirm that Jesus is God the Father. It is referring to Jesus as the Father of the ages. That is, Jesus Christ is eternal and is co-creator with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

While on the subject of creation it should be remembered that God said, “Let **us** make man in **our** own image, after **our likeness**. . .”(Gen. 1:26). God was speaking to someone or someones and said that **they** were to make man in **their** image. Certainly one can see the plural pronouns with reference to God. It will do the “oneness” no good to say “God was speaking to the angels,” for man is not created in the image of angels, but rather in the image of God.

Argument number thirteen: God is referred to as “I Am that I Am” (Exod. 34:14). Yet, Jesus claims to be the “I am” (John 8:24; 8:58). Therefore (it is argued), they are the one and the same.

Reply: None that believes the Bible doctrine of three persons in the Godhead deny that Jesus is the “I am.” This simply shows that Christ is eternal, that He is Deity.

Argument number fourteen: There is only one

Spirit (Eph. 4:4) and the Lord is that Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). Therefore, they are the same person.²⁰

Reply: This again shows how far one will go in perverting the Scriptures, taking them out of context to prove this doctrine. There is in fact “one Spirit,” but the same context plainly teaches, one Lord, and one God, as well as one Spirit (Eph. 4:4-6). 2 Corinthians 3:17 is taken out of context and made a “pretext.” 2 Corinthians 3:17 refers to the new covenant in contrast to the law of Moses!

Argument number fifteen: Since Jesus was begotten by the Holy Ghost, (Matt. 1:20), the Holy Ghost is the Father.

Reply: This “argument” is of no value to the “oneness” Pentecostal for if the Holy Spirit were the Father of Jesus, there would still be more than one person in the Godhead. The apostle Paul begat the Corinthians “by the Gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15). Were the Corinthians children of Paul? We are begotten by the Gospel preached by Paul. Are we children of Paul? The “argument” has Jesus “begotten of Himself, by himself, for himself, and is His own Father!”²¹

Argument number sixteen: The word “Trinity” is not in the Bible.

Reply: While the word “Trinity” is not expressly stated in the Bible, the doctrine itself is. Anyone with a dictionary can see that the word “trinity” means “three.” Is the word “three” in the Bible? John wrote, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 John 5:7). Consequently, the doctrine of the trinity is clearly taught in God’s Word.

The Scriptures Teach There Are Three Persons In The Godhead

Having noted various arguments offered the oneness Pentecostals, attention is now directed to the Bible’s affirmation that there are three distinct persons who possess the one divine nature (God). These are briefly stated.

Plural pronouns with reference to God (“us”, “ours,” etc.). Gen 1:26, 3:22, 11:7, Isa. 6:8.

Personal pronouns:

- (1) The Father: First person pronoun “I” (Heb. 1:5).
- (2) The Son: Second person pronoun “thou” (Heb. 1:5).
- (3) The Holy Spirit: Third person pronoun “He” (John 16:13).

There were three distinct persons at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16-17).

- (1) Jesus was baptized
- (2) The Father stated: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”
- (3) The Spirit descended like a dove.
- (4) Jesus often prayed to the Father.

Jesus came down from heaven, not to do **His own** will, but the will of **Him** that sent Him (John 6:38).

Christians are joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Christ is an heir (Heb. 1:2). From whom does He inherit? Jesus has a Father (John 14:12).

Conclusion

The Oneness Pentecostal doctrine of one person in the Godhead is not of God. It came as a result of man’s

innovation and is to be rejected. Even a casual reading of the Word of God reveals three persons within the Godhead. May all study God's word and come to a greater appreciation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen" (2 Cor. 13:14.)

Endnotes

1 J. Porter Wilhite, **Modern Churches and the Church**; (Shreveport, Louisiana: Lambert Book House, 1956), 205.

2 Ibid, 205-206.

3 Internet, **About the United Pentecostal Church International**.

4 Ibid.

5 Guy N. Woods, **Debate Charts**, Chart # 100 A, NP.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid, Chart # 100 B.

9 Ibid.

10 W. N. Jackson, **The Jackson-Bayer Debate on Pentecostalism**; (Fulton, MS: Sowing the Seed Books, 1980), Table of contents.

11 Internet, **Why We Baptize in Jesus' Name**, The United Pentecostal Church International.

12 **Wallace-Vaughn Debate**; (Shreveport, Louisiana: Lambert Book House, 1978), 42.

13 Guy N. Woods, **Debate Charts**; Chart # 50 B.

14 Ibid, Chart # 51.

15 Ibid, Chart # 108 B.

16 **Wallace-Vaughn Debate**; (Shreveport, Louisiana: Lambert Book House, 1978), 4.

17 Ibid, 6.

18 Ibid, 27.

19 Ibid, 7.

20 Ibid, 33.

21 Guy N. Woods, **Debate Charts**; Chart # 108 B.

CHAPTER 23

HOW THE GODHEAD DWELLS IN MAN

ROBERT R. TAYLOR, JR.

Introduction

GENUINE GRATITUDE IS EXPRESSED to B. J. Clarke, the elders here at Southaven and the entire membership for the coveted privilege and pleasure of speaking on this Power Lectureship as I have done on all the previous ones. I regard this as one of our premier lectureships. It surely is on the cutting edge of truth. I appreciate the selection this year. There is no more fabulous or fundamental theme than that of the Glorious Godhead—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

This topic title, and all it comprehends, is an interesting, intriguing and very challenging inquiry. Around this concept controversy reigns. This is true outside us; it is true inside us.

Injurious errors now inundate us relative to this concept and especially when men contend for a direct impact of the Godhead upon the human heart. Through the years this has been one of the distinctive differences between churches of Christ and our religious neighbors. We have contended, and rightly so, that the Godhead influences us solely through the Word of God; they, in strong contrast, have contended that there is a direct impact upon human hearts separate and apart from the

Word of God. They especially do this with the Holy Spirit. In fact, the direct operation of the Holy Spirit has long been one of the cardinal concepts of the Calvinistic world. Alexander Campbell addressed this concept with Rice in 1843 in Lexington, Kentucky. This debate attracted national attention. Henry Clay, the noted statesman, moderated for this debate. N. B. Hardeman addressed the same with Ben M. Bogard in the Little Rock, Arkansas, debate in 1938. It is deeply distressing and acutely alarming to realize that we now have preachers and professors among us who are closer to Rice and Bogard than to the truthful positions sustained so ably by the talented Campbell and Hardeman. Were these debates held today, many of our preachers and professors would be in Rice's and Bogard's corners cheering them on against Campbell and Hardeman!

Such is sad; it is inexpressibly sad.

Crossing Danger's Line

There is little or no controversy relative to the Godhead's indwelling us as this is promptly acceded. Yet, the how or the mode takes a different route—a personal, actual, literal, bodily and direct indwelling of the Holy Spirit representing the other two or the indwelling of all three by the marvelous means of God's Word. The latter will be the view set forth and defended in this extended study.

Some of my warmest and dearest friends contend for a personal and actual indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I have discussed the indwelling of Deity with at least two men who contended that **all** Three of the Godhead actually and personally indwell the Christian. One of these liked to speak of "We four"—a reference to the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and his own spirit as being personally and actually in him. I thought at the time he was only 25

percent correct! Yet, among those who hold the actual and personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit, their ardent allegiance and loving loyalty to the Word of God is **so** strong, steady, unbending and uncompromising, that they will **never** advocate or defend the Spirit's influencing them except by the wise, wonderful and weighty Word of Jehovah God.

Yet others do not possess this strong, unbending and uncompromising allegiance to the Word of God. They contend for an actual, literal, direct and personal indwelling of the Spirit and quickly affirm a direct impact of the Spirit on the heart and life totally severed from the Word of God. To be consistent they have to contend for this direct impact from God the Father and God the Son also. The First and Second Persons could not influence us solely through Their Word while the Third Person influences us directly, i. e., separate and apart from the Word of God. The all-sufficiency **of** Sacred Scripture is surrounded by such reckless approaches. Danger's line, by them, has been crossed and crossed perilously. As they **feed** more and more this claimed impact directly on their hearts and in their lives, they will feel less and less dependence, regard, reverence and awe for God's Word. The Psalmist declared, "but my heart standeth in awe of thy word" (Psm. 119:161).

Pentecostals exhibit the end of such reckless approaches as stated previously. I have had many discussions with Pentecostals. Not the first one thought nearly as much of God's Word as what he thought he had within him—the direct guidance of Deity and especially the Holy Spirit. I once had a Pentecostal preacher tell me every time I hemmed him into a corner, which was easy to do, "The Holy Spirit told me to tell you this!" Yet his arrogant claim did not coincide with what the Holy Spirit stated in Sacred Scripture. Like a broken record I kept

reminding him of this which he did not like at all! This is the very fallacious fodder that feeds the attitude verbally expressed so frequently, “I would not take what I feel here (patting the blood pump in the chest cavity) for a stack of Bibles a mile high!” Any one of that stack condemns them coming and going!

Now, of all things, we are hearing from among us that the Word of God just furnishes us **informationally**. Human words furnish us informationally but human words pale into insignificance compared to the dynamite of divine declarations. As I was growing up I could receive information from two sources about what course I should pursue—from my Dad, whom I greatly revered, and from a neighbor. The former was packed with power due to parental authority permeating said information; the latter lacked that pungency. God’s Word is packed with unlimited power; it is **far** more than informational. Jesus Christ knew that when he quoted from Moses in meeting Satanic darts hurled at Him (Matt. 4; Luke 4; cf. Deut. 8:3; 6:16,13). Paul knew that as he wrote of the dynamite of God’s great, good and glorious gospel in Romans 1:16-17. The writer of Hebrews knew that as he penned Hebrews 4:12. So did James in writing 1:18,21 of his inspired epistle.

Now, we are hearing of the supra-literary work of the Holy Spirit. Whatever happened to the saintly slogan of “speaking where the Bible speaks, being silent where it is silent and calling Bible things by Bible names?” “Supra” means “above, over, beyond” (Webster). It is the very same error as in a well-known lyric, “Beyond the sacred page I seek thee, Lord.” I often preach at a place where the brethren there have gone through all their song books containing this song and have replaced this “beyond” to a “within” which is a Scriptural concept. More and more we are hearing what the Holy Spirit is doing to children

of God directly. Are God the Father and God the Son directing the Holy Spirit to bypass the all-sufficient Word of God and influence Christians by a direct impact? Calvinists do this in both conversion and sanctification. Some of our brethren delay the direct bit and restrict it just to saints. It strongly appears they are telling us that the Word of God is powerful in conversion and no direct impact is needed, but in sanctification the Word of God is not nearly so powerful and the direct impact is imperative. This does not make even good non-sense!

Is The Indwelling Of The Godhead In A Child Of God Fact Or Fictional?

A young believer was once asked by a skeptic about this God in whom he believed as touching whether He is big or little. The trusting youth said, “He is so big and great that the Universe cannot contain Him and yet so small that He can dwell in my heart!” His Bible told him there was such an indwelling and he accepted it. It is factual—not fictional. Jesus envisioned His people as dwelling in Him and the Father. In John 14:23 Jesus promised the faithful eleven that lovers and keepers of Jesus and His Words will receive Father and Son and we “will make our abode with him. In John 17:21 we read:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

There could scarcely be an indwelling of God’s children in Him minus the corollary of His indwelling them. In 2 Corinthians 6:16 the Almighty declared, “...I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Who Are The Favored Recipients Of This Indwelling?

As previously noted the Father and Son will come and make Their abode with those who love the Lord and who keep His Word (John 14:23). Those who hate Deity and refuse any reverence toward the Word of God enjoy no indwelling from Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Transgressors who abide not in the doctrine of Christ do not have the Father. John so declared in 2 John 9-11. Lacking the Father, as manifestly they do, they have neither the Son nor the Spirit. Those who deny the Son are anti-Christ and **no** anti-Christ has Deity indwelling Him. Surely, no one will quarrel or quibble about this self-evident truth! Relative to spiritual gifts at Corinth Paul urged that those thus endowed conduct themselves in such fashion that unbelievers and the unlearned who were in attendance at their services will “report that God is in you of a truth” (1 Cor. 14:25).

Is This Indwelling For All Humanity Or A Limited Class?

It would be reckless indeed to affirm the former. Humanity is composed of unbelievers and believers. Does the Godhead indwell atheists, agnostics and infidels? If so, Paul missed greatly the mark of accuracy in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Humanity is composed of the vile and the virtuous. Does the Godhead equally indwell both classes? Humanity is composed of children of Satan and children of God. The former major maliciously in the works of the flesh as reflected in Galatians 5:19-21. The latter major, marvelously in the nine ingredients composing the Spirit’s fruit as delineated boldly and beautifully in Galatians 5:22,23. Does Deity equally indwell both? Humanity is composed of the redeemed and the lost? Does Deity equally indwell both? Humanity is composed of

those on their way to heaven and those riding a speeding roller coaster on their way to Eternal Gehenna. Does the Godhead equally indwell both diverse elements of humanity? All these are rhetorical questions; they contain their own built-in answers.

Salvation is limited to those who have obeyed the gospel and are continuing to walk in the light (the truth) as the Lord is in the truth (Rom. 6:17-18; 1 John 1:7). Redemption, reconciliation, justification, sanctification and sonship, are all in the realm of light or truth. Surely, those who have never been saved, redeemed, reconciled, justified, sanctified or made the sons and daughters of God cannot have Him who is of too pure an eye to behold (with approbation) evil, Him who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the very heavens or Him Who is the pure Spirit of holiness and truth (Hab. 1:13; Heb. 7:26; John 14:26; 16:13).

In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus declared dynamically that He and the Father would come and abide with those who love Him and keep His Words (John 14:23). Be it recalled that those who love God and Christ keep the commandments as prescribed in the New Testament (John 14:15; 15:14). Not all of humanity keep His commandments and honor His Words. Hence, not all love Him. Hence, not all can present a welcomed receptacle for Deity so to indwell.

Paul employed such expressions as “in Christ, in Christ Jesus, in Jesus Christ, in the Lord,” etc., about 170 times in the New Testament. Not a single Pauline usage of such is comprehensive enough to cover all humanity. “Christ in you, the hope of glory” is his precious pronouncement in Colossians 1:27. This chapter context reveals that Paul addressed “the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse” (v. 2). They possessed faith, love and hope (vs. 4,5). They were

fruitbearing (v. 6). They had been delivered from darkness and were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (vs. 13-14). Christ was their Head and they were members of His body (vs. 18-24).

Minus any quarreling or quibbling to the contrary the indwelling of Deity is limited to a certain class—children of God who are faithful and fervent.

Does The Father Indwell The Child Of God?

Several Scriptures answer affirmatively. Those who love Jesus and keep His Words are promised faithfully that both Father and Son will make an abode with them (John 14:23). This is the eloquent equivalent of an indwelling. The true and pure temple of God at Corinth was the Lord's church in that Grecian metropolis—not the temple of the goddess Aphrodite which was devoted to religious harlotry and to which lustful men hearkened in hordes. Corinthian Christians were promised by Paul that, "I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2 Cor. 6:16). The apostle of love, John, adds his forceful testimony in Words of clarity and conciseness by stating, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:15). All the foregoing Scriptures affirm a fact; they do **not** establish a mode or manner of the indwelling. This is an obvious point missed totally by those who are so confident that a literal, personal and actual indwelling of the First Person is set forth. They beg the question in such or assume they have proved what they have not established at all!

How Does He So Indwell?

If He is in us bodily, literally, actually, literally, personally and directly, why do we pray "Our Father who art in heaven?" (Matt. 6:9). Jesus was here on earth when

He issued forth this Model Prayer for His disciples. The Father was with Him and in Him as stated in John 17:21. Yet Jesus taught them to pray to the Father in heaven—not the Father “Who is in Me!” The Father was in Jesus yet He spoke of coming from the Father and His return to the Father at the time of His amazing ascension (John 7:29; 14:28; 20:17; cf. Dan. 7:13-14). This latter passage speaks of Jesus returning **to** the Ancient of Days. If the Father is personally, actually, literally, bodily and directly in every child of God, why would not such constitute an Incarnation? When the Second Person indwelt a human body, it was an Incarnation. Why would it be any different if it be the First Person personally, literally and actually indwelling a human body? **It would not be!!**

God the Father indwells His child by His Words and Will as They move and mold that child to become more and more like God, Christ and the Spirit of Holiness. Such is logically and Scripturally the **only** way one person can indwell another person.

Does Christ Indwell The Child Of God?

In a passage to which allusion has already been made more than once in this study, Jesus said that the person who loves Him and keeps His commandments will experience and enjoy an abode of both Him and the Father (John 14:23). He alluded to the same in His unity petitions in John 17:21. Cogently, clearly and concisely, Paul wrote, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Paul was exceedingly fond of such eloquent expressions as being “in Christ, in Jesus Christ, in Christ Jesus, in the Lord,” etc. (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:6,15; Col. 2:6). The corollary of each of these would be His indwelling us. But again, these affirm a fact; they do **not** establish a mode or manner.

How Does He So Indwell?

It just so happens that Paul informs us touching the

how of His indwelling the children of God. He penned this crystal clear statement, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love....” (Eph. 3:17). Faith derives from hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

Where is Christ now? He is on the right hand of God. Acts 2:33; 7:55 and Hebrews 1:3 so position Him during the gospel dispensation. On Solomon’s porch, in Acts 3:20-21, Peter said He would be retained there until the time for His second advent. John, in 1 John 2:1-2, portrays Him as being in heaven as our Advocate, the very One who represents our cause in the Heavenly Court.

If He is actually, bodily, literally, personally and directly in us, then to the extent of such indwelling we would be part Deity? If not, **why not?**

To a modern claimant of His actual, literal, personal and direct indwelling him I once stated, “If Jesus Christ comes back in your lifetime, He will not have to descend from heaven but simply step out of you and presto He will be here!” He had no refutation for my observation and refutation of his claims.

As in the case of the Father, the Son indwells us as His Word and will move and mold us into becoming more and more like Him. Again, I maintain that this is the **only** Scriptural and logical way one person can indwell another individual.

Does The Holy Spirit Indwell The Child Of God?

I answer in the affirmative even as with the indwelling of Father and Son in God’s son and Deity’s daughter. Three verses from Paul’s powerful, practical and prolific pen express the matter clearly and cogently:

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if

so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his... But if the Spirit of him, that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit That dwelleth in you ... And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Rom. 8:9,11; Gal. 4:6).

As observed with the Father's indwelling and the Son's indwelling, I state again that these verses assert a fact—not a manner or mode of said indwelling.

Is the Holy Spirit actually, personally, literally and directly in every child of God? Many among us will answer in the negative when similar queries pertain to the Father's indwelling and the Son's indwelling. Yet, and very promptly, they render an ardent affirmative to the actual, personal, literal and direct indwelling of the Third Person. With surface assurance they will contend that Father and Son indwell us representatively, i. e., through the actual, literal, personal and direct indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Promptly, they appeal to Ephesians 2:21-22 which states:

In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

The ASV says "in the Spirit." Does this passage say that God and Christ do not indwell us actually, personally, literally and directly but that the Holy Spirit does indeed indwell us actually, personally, literally and directly? I do not believe it does. Paul is dealing in Ephesians 2 with the meeting and merging of Jew and Gentile into the body

of Christ or the family of God. Look at the emphasis he gives the word “both.” We have “both” in verses 14,16,18. This beautiful and comforting word composes Jews and Gentiles who have become reconciled to God and to one another. It is in Christ that Jews and Gentiles have “the building fitly framed together (v. 21). It is in Christ that Jews and Gentiles who have been redeemed “groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (v. 21). Worship permeates this valiant verse. It is in Christ that Jews and Gentiles “are builded together for an habitation of God through (in—ASV) the Spirit” (v. 22). Unity and worship permeate verses 21-22—not an apostolic discourse on the precise mode and manner of the Spirit’s indwelling of God’s child.

The How Of His Indwelling

It is precisely the same way as God the Father and Christ the Son indwell us—by the marvelous means of Heaven’s will as set forth in the Holy Bible. It is eisegesis—not exegesis—to contend for a different type of indwelling of the Spirit than for the First and Second Persons in Their indwelling of God’s children.

Refutation Of An Emerging Error

It is now contended that Father and Son are in heaven but the Holy Spirit is not there but in God’s people on earth. One advocate of this view claims that no one can supply a Scripture that locates the Holy Spirit in heaven during the gospel dispensation. There is such a thing as “Biblical Anticipation Of Error.” I often preach on this topic. I believe there has never, is not now and never will be a religious error but what the Holy Spirit has anticipated its emergence and given us the ammunition to answer each fallacy. It just so happens in the early verses of Revelation 1 that John gives us a stately tribute to all the Godhead—the Father, the Son and the

Holy Spirit. The latter is set forth under the heading of the “Seven Spirits of God.” Seven is a number of completion and perfection within Holy Writ. What better way to describe the Third Person of the Godhead? Where did John locate the “Seven Spirits of God?” Before the August Throne of God Almighty is my reply. I wonder why John did not locate the “Seven Spirits of God” in himself since he was an apostle and an early recipient of Holy Spirit baptism in Acts 2. I am made to wonder why the banished apostle did not locate the “Seven Spirits of **God**” directly and personally in and among the seven churches of Asia to whom this book would later be sent. There is **not** this imagined separation of the Timeless Trinity during the gospel dispensation with two of them in heaven and the other on earth literally and directly indwelling the children of God.

Is There Any Appreciable Difference In How All Three Indwell Us?

Not in the least! Minus all question or quibble to the contrary all Three of the Godhead indwell us in precisely the **same** way. If we can determine how one indwells us, we can know how the other two do also. The projected case becomes even stronger if we can determine from Sacred Scripture how two of the Godhead indwell us. The remaining one must indwell the same way.

In Ephesians 3:17 we are told that the Christ indwells our hearts by faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Surely, this is the stately **how** of the Son’s indwelling us. In John 14, Jesus spoke frequently and fervently about His and the Father’s abode with the disciples. Those who love Deity and obey Heaven’s commandments are the ones to whom Father and Son come and abide. The Son indwells by faith; the Father does the same. The case is already strong

for the Spirit's indwelling the same way. However, we can make it just as strong as with the other two. In Ephesians 5:18 we are enjoined to "be filled with the Spirit..." This apostolic directive is enjoined upon us and in compliance thereunto we are active—not passive. The precious parallel in Colossians 3:16 provides a divinely inspired commentary on the apostolic injunction in Ephesians 5:18. Paul stated authoritatively and articulately, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Thus, the Spirit indwells us by the precious possession of Christ's Word in our hearts. As that Word or Will motivates, moves and molds us we are indwelled by the Holy Spirit for a stately surety.

Are We Part Deity?

If all Three are in us actually, bodily, literally, personally and directly, then to that extent of that indwelling we are part God and could worship the Deity that is in each of us. If not, **why not?** On that supposition it is a bit difficult to understand Peter's actions with Cornelius in Acts 10:25-26. **No part** of Peter's personality was Deity and none knew it better than the perturbed proclaimer relative to a prostrate Cornelius worshipping at his feet. He spoke firmly, "Stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:26). He laid no claim whatsoever in being both God and man, Christ and man or the Holy Spirit and man.

What constituted Jesus Christ as Incarnate? He was Deity in human flesh (John 1:14). God the Father gave Him a body in which to tabernacle (Heb. 10:5ff). He was called Emmanuel the significance of which was "God with us" (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). If the Holy Spirit is actually, literally, personally, bodily and directly in the human personality, then to that extent each child of God would be part Deity. If not, **why not?** Are we really ready for

the full implication of this widespread contention that the Spirit indwells us actually, bodily, literally, personally and directly? If directly, what place has the Bible in the influence department? Calvinism, move over! Some of our brethren who are contending for a direct impact of the Spirit on our hearts subsequent to conversion and minus any sort of medium are headed your way with breakneck speed! Such is sad; it is inexpressibly sad.

Some among us avoid the word “direct” in their contention for a personal indwelling. But if the indwelling is **not** by the means of a medium, the Word of God, then “direct” has to be the end of their contention. If not, **why not?**

Words Of Weight And Wisdom From Brother Guy N. Woods

Apparently, one of the final articles from the pen of the versatile Woods was entitled, “A Historic Debate,” which appeared in the Advocate subsequent to his death in 1993. It was his scholarly review of the Hardeman-Bogard Debate held in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1938. When I was writing the material for my book, *The Bible Doctrine Of The Holy Spirit*, I requested and received permission from Neil Anderson to quote from that perceptive article with his (Woods) incisive observations relative to the Holy Spirit which I now include in this study. After giving a number of quotes from brother Hardeman relative to the Holy Spirit and how He influences man, brother Woods stated in his own incomparable, unique style of masterful writing:

And so also is the conviction of the writer of these lines. The view, that the Holy Spirit exercises an influence apart from, and beyond that of the Word of God is a new, novel and dangerous

doctrine, unheard of in churches of Christ until recent years. We challenge any man among us to produce a statement from any prominent writer from the inception of the Restoration Movement until 1950 who taught that there is additional guidance and direction through the Spirit not derived directly from God's Word. Any differences, which obtained between brethren in earlier days regarding the manner or mode of the Spirit's "indwelling," did not extend to contentions to produce the view that says the Baptist Bogard was right in his insistence that there are influences wrought upon us by the Spirit in addition to the written Word. Such a view is, of course, an impeachment of the authority, totality and all sufficiency of the sacred Writings; and it paves the way for the gross departures of those advocating tongue-speaking, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and special revelations now increasingly being heard among us. I believe that these unfortunate and fatal trends are logical and natural consequences of the view that the Holy Spirit actually, bodily and literally resides in us and exercises powers over us beyond the divine revelation of truth set out in Scriptures. If I believed that such is so, I certainly would expect some outward, visible manifestation thereof. Strange indeed would it be that such power is present, yet not outwardly active. Why limit Him? "Tongue speakers" are at least consistent in their error.

These disastrous and dangerous views have resulted from an abandonment of the teachings of Scriptures touching the personality of the Holy Spirit. He is a person, not a mere influence (John 16:13). A person does not literally abide—nor can he—in the person of another. One person

influences another person through moral suasion. Such is the manner by which the Spirit always has acted. “The Spirit of the Lord spake by me” (2 Sam. 23:2 KJV). “The Spirit speaketh expressly” (I Tim. 4:1). “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches:...” (Rev. 2:7). God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, all of them divine Persons, are in us as they influence us by the Word of truth (I John 4:15; Col. 1:27; Gal. 4:6). To reject the Word of God is to reject the Spirit who gave the Word (Neh. 9:30).¹

In my judgment, brother Woods has set forth the truth here. It is what I have believed, preached and defended for many, many years. Please note that brother Woods did not use “supra-literary” relative to the Holy Spirit. He did not have to qualify his usage of all-sufficiency by imposing arbitrarily the concept informational which I regard as slanderous toward God’s all powerful and profitable word.

Conclusion

“I can see your Dad in you” has been often said to me by people who knew both him (1901-1971) and now know me. Yet during the forty years we were contemporary with each other, 1931-1971, I was not in him personally nor was he in me personally or actually. But as his principles, ideals and good example have moved and molded me, as indeed they have, he is in me and yet not actually, bodily, literally, personally or directly. The same principle works in the way the Godhead indwells the child of God. This indwelling is through a medium—the Word of God. **Here I Stand!**

Endnotes

1 Guy N. Woods, **A Historic Debate**, Gospel Advocate, December, 1993, Vol. CXXXV, No. 12, p. 43, (used by special permission from Neil Anderson, Quoted in Robert R. Taylor, Jr. **The Bible Doctrine Of The Holy Spirit** (Abilene, Quality Publications, 1996), pp. 189-190.

CHAPTER 24

FALSE IDEAS ABOUT GOD

WAYNE COX

WHEN GIVEN AN ASSIGNMENT of this nature, one is immediately confronted with the question, “Where do I begin?” To say the least, “False Ideas About God” is a topic broad in scope, so much so that an entire lectureship series could be devoted to it and still not even begin to cover all the aspects of it.

Generally, where there is the true, there is the false; where there is the right, there is the wrong; and where there is the genuine, there is the counterfeit. Such is the case concerning God. The truth concerning God is set forth in Scripture, as opposed to the foolish jargon, opinions, philosophies, speculations, and ideas of man.

Granted, we will never know all there is to know about God; He has given us but a glimpse of Himself in Scripture. The finite can never truly comprehend the infinite:

Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? (Job 11:7). I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number (Job 5:8-9).

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither

are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Rom. 11:33).

While we cannot know everything about God, we can know what He has revealed to us concerning Himself. There is no excuse, then, for the erroneous concepts many have regarding Deity.

But, sadly, many and varied are the misconceptions concerning God. In researching an assignment such as this, one almost concludes that there are about as many ideas concerning God as there are people! For instance, over a thousand people living in “one nation under God” were asked this question, “What Is God?” Here are their answers:

- ⇒ 73% - God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfect Creator.
- ⇒ 10% - God is the realization of personal human fulfillment.
- ⇒ 6% - God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach.
- ⇒ 6% - Don't know.
- ⇒ 2% - Everyone is God.
- ⇒ 2% - There are many gods; each with different power and authority.
- ⇒ 1% - There is no such thing as God.¹

Hugo McCord refers to the fallacious ideas that several have regarding God; he also draws an appropriate conclusion regarding such:

He who says that God is simply love or pure spirituality or an abstract ideal (Plato) or an old man with a beard or is man's creation (Xenophanes) or is a projection of the human mind (Feuerbach) or is wishful thinking (Freud) or is dead (Nietzsche) or is simply the ground of our being (Tillich) or one who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, has not considered the evidence.²

In a reference chart entitled, "Numbers of Followers of All Religions," some seventeen different major religions are listed, many of which are subdivided even further; one is a "catch all" category labeled "Other Religionists." Each of these has varying views concerning God.³

With so many false ideas of God prevalent in our world, we obviously will not "scratch the surface" or touch the proverbial "hem of the garment" of these in a brief chapter in a lecture book. Our discussion, of necessity, must be limited and brief.

We have been assigned the following lesson objectives: (1) Note some of the prominent misconceptions that men in the world, in the religious world, and in the church have about God, and (2) Discuss man's attempts to make God in His image. To fulfill our responsibilities, we will use this two-fold approach: First, we want to note some false ideas about God in the past, and second, some false ideas about God in the present.

False Ideas About God In The Past

God's being misunderstood is nothing new. Let's consider just one case in point from the past concerning Jesus, God's Son. It was Emerson who wrote: "To be great is to be misunderstood."⁴ Christ was certainly great, and was He ever misunderstood! While He was on earth, there were many misconceptions concerning Him. Some

misjudged His motives, while others misread His actions. Many critics misunderstood Christ because their hearts were filled with envy and hate. They joked about His birth, insinuating illegitimacy. They averred that His origin was not heavenly at all, but that He belonged to the devil. In the end, they crucified our Savior on a cross, mainly due to a deliberate failing to understand what He was all about.

For a glimpse of some false ideas about Christ, consider the text of Mark 3. Here we find, among other things, Jesus being misunderstood by:

The Pharisees

As Jesus went about doing good, helping, healing, and teaching others, the religious leaders of the day, the law-making Pharisees, purposely misunderstood Christ's intent and mission:

And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him (Mark 3:1-6).

The Pharisees, consumed by their own laws and rigid

rules, had closed their eyes, ears and hearts to compassion and the true meaning of the law. With calloused minds and ulterior motives, they concluded Jesus to be a law-breaker, and worthy of destruction. What a false idea they had!

His Own People

And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself (Mark 3:20-21).

The popularity of Jesus was enormous among the common people at this time. The multitudes thronged Him whenever He was in a public setting, as on this occasion, and Christ was completely absorbed in ministering to them. In fact, Jesus and His men were so immersed in their work that they missed a meal. Talk about being busy!

His friends concluded that Jesus had become insane: “He is beside himself” (KJV); “He is out of His mind” (NKJV). They had in mind a straitjacket for Jesus to put Him away, having mistaken His passion in His work for insanity. No doubt they were thinking, “He’s too hard on Himself – He’s mentally unbalanced – He’s consumed by religious frenzy⁵ – He’s a fanatic!” How wrong they were!

The Scribes

The scribes were expert attorneys in the Law, and were dispatched from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus. Their official conclusion?

And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the

prince of the devils casteth he out devils (Mark 3:22).

Jesus would not allow this blasphemous misconception of His power go without rebuke; thus, He answered, pointing out the foolishness behind their accusation:

And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house. Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit (Mark 3:23-30).

The scribes discovered first-hand that having false ideas about God can be detrimental!

His Family

It was bad enough being misunderstood by the scribes and Pharisees and His hometown people, but what really had to hurt was the inaccurate view His own family had of Him:

There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling

him (Mark 3:31).

Though one should not be dogmatic on this point, as everything has not been revealed, many Bible students believe the reason Jesus' family waited outside and called for Him is because they too shared the view that He had lost His mind. They did not believe in Him (John 7:5); perhaps they wanted to talk some sense in Him, convince Him to give up the foolish notion that He was the Messiah, and resume His carpentry trade.

In any event, Jesus uses this opportunity to assert His kinship with all those who do the will of God:

And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother (Mark 3:32-35).

Unfortunately, these just mentioned did not have a monopoly when it came to having false ideas about God; the number is legion today of those who likewise express erroneous concepts of Deity.

False Ideas About God In The Present

In The World

Atheism. Atheism maintains there is no God. From grade school to the university level, unbelief in God is spread, and such has made shipwreck the faith of many. To the atheist, God is no more than a Jewish myth, or a legend, or a fable - in the same category as "Hansel and

Gretel” or “Jack and the Beanstalk.” In a book titled, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science As a Candle in the Dark* written a year before he died, the late astronomer of renown, Carl Sagan, included praying to God in the same category as astrology, spoon-bending, witches, and ESP as examples of the persistence of irrationality.⁶

Communism has no place for God in its school of thought, maintaining that “belief in God obstructs people from shaping their own lives and determining their own destinies,”⁷ and is but “opium of the people.”⁸ Cicero’s comment is appropriate at this point: “There is no nation so barbarous, no people so savage as not to believe in God.”⁹

The atheist would have us believe that it is out-of-date to believe in God in our age of science, that faith in God is no more than a blind “leap in the dark”, and that reason rules out faith in God. However, as James D. Bales observes: “If we rule out God, we must also rule out reason!”¹⁰ He gives a succinct summary of just what the atheist believes:

The atheist believes that matter in motion is the only reality. Matter is all that exists. This is all the atheist has to start with and it is all with which he ends. No matter how thin you slice it, or whether you slice it straight, or cut it crooked, it is still matter. The clod in the farmer’s field, the star in the sky, the mother and her love, the man and his vision, the bed bug and the virus are all merely manifestations of matter. They are identical in nature but different in form and organization. They are but bits of matter shoved around by other bits of matter.

Matter existed once in a disorganized state, but out of disorder finally came the orderly arrangement of our universe. Matter in motion,

without intelligent forethought or direction, created the present form of our universe. Furthermore, this non-living matter created living man; this non-thinking matter created man with his power of reflection; this non-conscious matter created conscious man; this non-moral matter created man with his moral sensitivity, and this non-religious matter created man with his religious aspirations. Thus, to believe in atheism one must believe in a non-living, non-thinking, non-conscious, non-moral, and non-religious Creator who made man without any use of intelligence and without knowing that its non-directed motions finally created man. Believe it, he who is gullible enough!¹¹

God bluntly describes the unbeliever in no uncertain terms: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psm.14:1). Even demons are smarter than atheists, for at least they “believe and tremble” (Jas. 2:19)!

For one to deny the existence of God, he must be everywhere and know everything – a tall order indeed! As Davis states:

There may be a God some place where the atheist has not been unless he knows everything, and unless he knows everything, there may be a God among the things he does not know. The best any kind of an infidel can do is to say that he does not believe there is a God. And that does not take him out of the class of fools.¹²

The evidence is overwhelming that God is. Everywhere one looks, in the heavens above, on the earth below, or in the seas beneath, he sees proof of a Creator and Sustainer of life. This fact is evident from the questions

God asked of Job:

Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it? (Job 38:28-29).

God's handiwork has been written in the heavens: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psm.19:1). It is as Paul said:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

A French revolutionist once told the peasants, "I am going to tear down your steeple so you will have nothing to remind you of your superstition." The peasants replied, "You can't tear down the stars!"¹³ God is here, whether we believe it or not!

The various systems of ethics, philosophy, and human behavior set forth by atheism and humanism fail to give man a reason for and purpose in life. Only God has revealed unto man that great purpose: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13).

God is cruel. An outgrowth of atheism is the belief that if there is a God, then He is a cruel, vindictive, harsh, mean, unmerciful being; He wound the universe up and withdrew from it,¹⁴ totally unconcerned about the plight of man. Such a view says that man is no more to God than a fly on a windowpane!

The atheist's number one argument against the

existence of God is the problem of suffering and evil in the world. David Hume held that the existence of evil either indicts God's goodness or His power, as he repeated Epicurus' questions:

Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?¹⁵

Indeed, many are perplexed by the problem of evil in the world. In his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Harold Kushner writes:

There is only one question which really matters: why do bad things happen to good people? All other theological conversation is intellectually diverting....Virtually every meaningful conversation I have ever had with people on the subject of God and religion has either started with this question, or gotten around to it before long.¹⁶

While we make no claim to having all the answers to all the questions that are often raised as per the problem of evil, we do know: (1) God never intended for suffering to be in the world, but man through sin ushered it in; and (2) Suffering can have beneficial effects. With reference to Job, Henry Gariepy writes:

Trial and affliction similarly bring out the quality already present in a life. As pure gold shines all the brighter when put to the fire, so faith glows the more radiant when put to the fiery test. In the end, Job's faith and trust, which already had made him a model in God's sight,

enabled him to “come forth as gold.”¹⁷

He continues, describing the precious insights trials can provide us:

The Arabs have a proverb: “All sunshine makes a desert.” (They ought to know.) When life is easy, it is possible to live on the surface of things. But when trial and sorrow come, then one is driven to the deeper things. Then one can enter into the secrets and beauties of God. It is in the storm that God arches His rainbow over us, its multi-splendor revealing all the elements of color that make up the beauty of the world. Life’s greatest revelations come in its storms.¹⁸

The fact that God has offered His grace to every man, that He “is love” (1 John 4:8), that He made the ultimate sacrifice of His only-begotten Son for the human race, and that He extends His offer of salvation to all reveals that He does care about us and is not the cold, callous, cruel being some charge Him to be.

In The Religious World

Ironically, more false ideas about God are espoused by those who profess to believe in Him than by those who do not! Here is but a sampling survey of some of them found:

In World Religions. Wayne Jackson, in an excellent article entitled, “Christianity and World Religions,” states:

The study of world religions leaves many people with a profound sense of confusion. Widely divergent beliefs are held by multitudes whose sincerity can hardly be questioned, and such a

state frequently causes some to question the validity of *all* religion....There was a time in this country when most Christians had little need for information concerning the concepts of Eastern philosophies and religions, but that day is past. We are now living in a much smaller world. Rapid transportation has made obsolete that saying, "East is East; West is West, and never the twain shall meet."¹⁹

In fact, the Eastern religions are encroaching more and more upon those of us here in the West, all having different views of God, many of which do not square with Scripture! There then is the growing need on our part to have a greater awareness of their convictions.

Buddhism, for instance, abounds with false ideas about God. In fact, in some branches of Buddhism, one can be a Buddhist in good standing and not even have to acknowledge the existence of God!²⁰ Jackson further elaborates:

Buddhism denies the existence of a personal God altogether (because of the seeming inequities of human suffering). Buddhism has been described as a non-theistic, ethical discipline; a man-created, self-training system with no faith or worship. Surely man ought to recognize that man needs more than man!²¹

Hinduism,²² out of which Buddhism has grown, contains no consistent theological concept. It is a sort of pick-what-you-will philosophy. Generally, Hindus are polytheistic (worshiping many gods), but one may be a Hindu and revere few gods, one god, or *no* god! Hinduism is also quite pantheistic.²³

Islam, a major world religion numbering some 1.5 billion worldwide,²⁴ is monotheistic in nature; however, their concept of the one true God is out of harmony with Bible teaching. Those of the Islamic persuasion: (1) Never think of God as “Father;” (2) Do not love God, but fear Him and think of Him as a judge; (3) Rely totally on works for salvation minus all grace; and (4) Believe in an arbitrary God who is the cause of both good and evil.²⁵ Concerning Christ, they believe that He “was just a man, an apostle of God, but was not God or God’s Son nor was He resurrected from the dead.”²⁶

While we admire the sincerity and zeal of many in these and other world religions, we cannot uphold their false views of God. Scripture demands faith in the one God (Heb. 11:6; Eph. 4:6) of love (1 John 4:8), grace and salvation (Tit. 2:11), and impartiality (Rom. 2:11).

In Universalism. Universalists maintain that God is so good, loving, kind, and merciful that He would never “swat a fly” or “step on a roach.” As a theological term, universalism “denotes the belief that God will ultimately save all people, since, as it is supposed, a just and loving God cannot permit the universe to end in dualism.”²⁷ According to this belief, no one has to fear torment in hell, for on the judgment day God will open wide His arms and welcome all into heaven regardless. Such may be a comforting thought, but, at the same time, it is only wishful thinking! Scripture still speaks of the dual nature of God (Rom. 11:22)²⁸ and one day His punishing the disobedient, many in number, with torment, and rewarding the righteous, few in number, with rest (Matt. 7:13-14; 2 Thess. 1:6-9).

In Denominationalism. Denominationalism has a “multi-faceted God”, a “God” of one’s own choosing. It is no wonder denominationalists cry, “join the church of your choice,” for they believe in a “God of your choice.” While

confronting religious error, proponents of such usually exclaim, “What difference does it make? We all worship the same God!” as if worshiping the same Deity is all that really matters. But, we ask, does everyone religious worship the same God? Hardly. Note the following diverse views as to the nature of the Godhead:

Christian Science: Jesus was the Son of God, but not God. He did not die on the cross, nor did His shed blood cleanse from sin.²⁹

Jehovah Witnesses. Jesus is not God, but a “god” Michael the archangel. He was raised a spirit.³⁰

Mormon: The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also.³¹ God himself was once as we are now and is an exalted man.³²

The false idea of how God saves is found in denominational circles. For many, it is simply a matter of “salvation of one’s choice,” from “grace only” to “faith only” to “do your own thing only” (as long as, of course, baptism is excluded!):

Baptist: Becoming a Christian is a matter of believing on Christ. Faith plus nothing and minus nothing, is the way to salvation. Man has eternal life the minute he believes.³³

First Christian: This is a complete list of the dogma of our church. I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and I accept Him as my personal Savior.³⁴

Methodist: The doctrine of justification of faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort.³⁵

Since God saves, He ought to know what man’s requirements are for salvation! Nowhere in Scripture is salvation said to be a matter of anything “only,” but rather

a combination of faith, repentance, confession, baptism, and faithful living.

Denominationalists often have a false view as to how God communicates today. From whisperings in the ear, to still, small voices, to dreams, to visions, to being knocked to one's knees at work – these and others are ways God supposedly reveals His will to individuals today.³⁶ In their book, *God's Will: You Can Know It*, Leslie and Bernice Flynn illustrate some popular ways of discerning God's will; here is one example:

A lady received a brochure outlining a tour to Israel. She had the time, money, and strength to take the trip but wondered if it were God's will. Rereading the pamphlet just before retiring, she noted that the airplane for the trip was a 747 jet. She tossed all night, restlessly arguing the pros and cons of fulfilling a lifelong ambition to visit the Holy Land. Awaking in the morning, she looked at her digital clock. It said 7:47. She exclaimed, "It must be the Lord's will for me to take that tour."³⁷

There is no question that at one time God did speak directly to men in various ways, such as in dreams and visions, but today we have His written Word – the faith "once for all delivered" (Jude 3 – ASV) as the only means by which He converses with us.

These by no means exhaust the list of false ideas about God found in the denominational world, but are representative of a few.

In the church. We truly wish this did not have to be included in the lecture, but false ideas of God can be found even among the very people of God! Some have the idea that God:

Is weak. There are those who conceive of God as

being a grandfatherly type being, old, with a long beard, leaning on a cane, weak and passive and out of control, tentatively sitting on heaven's edge wondering how to handle difficult situations that arise. Such a concept is nothing short of heresy!

James Boice writes these words about the strength of our God:

We do not have a strong church today nor do we have *many* strong Christians. We can trace the cause to an acute lack of sound spiritual knowledge. Why is the church weak? Why are individual Christians weak? It's because they have allowed their minds to become conformed to the "spirit of this age," with its mechanistic, godless thinking. They have forgotten what God is like and what He promises to do for those who trust Him. Ask an average Christian to talk about God. After getting past the expected answers you will find that his god is a little god of vacillating sentiments. He is a god who would like to save the world but who cannot. He would like to restrain evil, but somehow he finds it beyond his power. So he has withdrawn into semiretirement, being willing to give good advice in a grandfatherly sort of way, but for the most part he has left his children to fend for themselves in a dangerous environment.

Such a god is not the God of the Bible...the God of the Bible is not weak; He is strong. He is all-mighty...Nothing disturbs or puzzles Him. His purposes are always accomplished.³⁸

Doesn't mean what He says. However, Scripture affirms that it is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18); He keeps His promises. Abraham knew such to be the case,

as he “staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief” (Rom. 4:20). Every word God spoke He meant to speak; every word He wrote He meant to write – God never wasted words or parchment. We have a God of truth Who says what He means and means what He says!

Refuses to forgive. As a result of this false concept of God, we continually beat ourselves over the head and pound ourselves into the ground wrestling with a sinful past for no reason! Scripture reveals a merciful, forgiving God, willing to give man abundant opportunities for repentance and cleansing. David, the deceiving, conniving, adulterating, murderer was truly forgiven of God, as was Saul the persecutor, as was Peter the denier of Christ, as were those who crucified Christ, and as could have been Judas Iscariot and every other sinner as well. We serve the God of a “second chance,” Who does not give up on us when we make a mistake and make amends for such. Let’s leave the past in the past!

Ignores sin in our lives. At the other extreme are those who believe and act as if God’s grace gives license to sin. One of the five things the Bible says God cannot do is to “look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13). Of course, God sees sin, but the meaning here is that He cannot approve of it, condone it, or tolerate it. His eyes cannot bear what is morally unclean.

However, how often we minimize the consequences of sin by saying: “It will all come out in the wash;” “One hundred years from now it will be forgotten;” “He’s just sowing his wild oats;” or “Boys will be boys.” How foolish to belittle the disastrous effects of sin!

What are the tragic consequences of sin? “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption...” (Gal. 6:7-8). God’s law of sowing and

reaping is as old as time; the law holds true in the spiritual realm as well as in the physical. There is no “pulling a fast one” with God; we cannot sow wild oats and pray for a crop failure – we must face the consequences!

Is regional in scope. In the minds of some, God is only concerned about certain people who live in a certain area. This misconception hampers support for and involvement in evangelistic and mission work, especially that in foreign countries. However, the Great Commission is universal in extent: “Go ye into all the world” (Mark 16:15).

The mission of the disciples then is our mission today. Reaching the lost with the gospel message is a never-ending, on-going process, as the world’s population constantly fluctuates through the process of birth and death. It is roughly estimated that three babies are born per second, 95 million per year in our world,³⁹ and that two people die per second, 60 million per year on this planet⁴⁰ – most of which have never even heard of Christ and are headed to eternity in a lost condition! How utterly tragic that the world knows more about McDonald’s and Coca-Cola than salvation through our Lord! Hence, our mission is an imperative one. It must be top priority – on the “front burner” of our list of things to do. “Get the gospel to the lost” must be our unrelenting drive and motto for life!

A healthy daily dose of reading and applying Scripture would go a long way in eradicating these and many other false ideas we in the church have concerning Jehovah.

Man’s Attempts To Make God In His Image

To a great extent, we have already noted ways in which man has sought to bring God down to his level. Every effort to conform God’s will to one’s wishes, is, in

essence, an attempt to dethrone God and enthrone man. Every assault upon the validity of God's existence; every attack upon the integrity of God's sovereignty; every denial of God's supremacy – all are efforts of man's making God in his image and desiring the very worship belonging to God alone!

In the end, man makes himself God. Is this not what the Gentiles did in turning to idolatry (Rom. 1:23)? Is this not what many of the Caesar's did in coercing homage of the people and demanding the confession, "Caesar is Lord"? Is this not what Herod Agrippa did in accepting the worship of the people and allowing them to blaspheme the name of God as they adored and exalted him (Acts 12:21-23)? Is this not what the communists did when they revered Stalin?⁴¹ Is this not what many atheists do in making such statements as "All gods must be reduced to their proper servitude to man,"⁴² and "God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is"?⁴³ Is this not what denominationalists do in clamoring, "Join the church of your choice"? Is this not what some in the church do by compromising the truth? By calling for unauthorized change? By choosing idols out of all shapes, sizes, and colors and relegating God to second place?

Rest assured, God will still be God, regardless of man's attitude toward Him. His unending wrath awaits those foolish enough to deny Him His rightful place (Rom. 1:18)!

Conclusion

We end this study as we began, with a question. Now, however, instead of "Where do I begin?" we are forced to ask, "Where do I end?" We have opened a "Pandora's box" of false ideas of God that is not easy to close. We have begun a study that, this side of eternity, has no end; there have always been and will always be numerous

misconceptions of our heavenly Father. Such false ideas are not the responsibility of the Bible, however, but the fault of sinful man who ignores, twists, perverts, and distorts Scripture until he has a god of his own choosing.

May God help us to have the proper attitude toward Him that we ought to have, to reverence Him as the Almighty, to accept His Will as ours without reservation, to give Him our undying devotion, and to allow Him to answer our many unanswered questions the other side of eternity, if He so chooses.

We concur with the Psalmist: “O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth” (Psm. 8:1)!

Endnotes

1 Barna Research Group as listed in **House to House/Heart to Heart**, Vol. 1 No. 3 (Tiplersville, Ms: Tiplersville church of Christ), 1.

2 Hugo McCord, “The Case From Theism” in **The Case For Christianity**, 1989 East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions Lectureship, ed. Edwin Jones (Knoxville, Tn: Karns church of Christ, 1989), 337.

3 Michael Martin, **Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia** (Microsoft Corp., 1993–1997).

4 Ralph Waldo Emerson, as quoted in **The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations**, 3rd ed. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1980), 207.

5 William Hendricksen, **The Gospel of Mark** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 133.

6 Kenneth L. Woodward, “Is God Listening?” in **Reader’s Digest**, Vol. 151, July 1997, 15-17.

7 Stephen Neill, “God in Other Religions” in **Eerdmans’ Handbook to Christian Belief** (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 199.

8 Neill, **Eerdmans’ Handbook to Christian Belief**, 199. Amazingly, many children of Communists came to believe in God. As Bales observes, “And, even though some people have tried to rear children without faith in God, as the Communists

do, it is amazing how many of them believe in God. On March 24, 1967, **LIFE** Magazine quoted Stalin's daughter as saying: "I believe in God. There must be some superhuman force." James D. Bales, **The God-Killer?** (Tulsa, Ok: Christian Crusade Publications, 1967), 122.

9 As quoted by Andrew Connally, "The Bible View of God" in **The Spiritual Sword**, Vol. 1 No. 2 (Memphis, Tn: Getwell church of Christ), 32.

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12 W.M. Davis, "Thirsting for God" in **The Knight Arnold News**, Vol. 15 No. 13 (Memphis, Tn: Knight Arnold church of Christ), 1.

13 Connally, **The Spiritual Sword**, 33.

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18 Garipey, **Portraits of Perseverance**, 127-128.

19 Wayne Jackson, "Christianity and World Religions" in **The Restorer**, Mar. 1994, 6.

20 Jackson, **The Restorer**, 6.

21 Jackson, **The Restorer**, 7.

22 A Hindu bathing ritual in the Ganges River is reported by the Guinness Book of World Records to be the largest religious gathering on earth. In April of this year, some ten million participants plunged into the rushing waters of this river, believing their sins would be washed away in the process. Associated Press Report, "Ten Million Hindus Bathe in Ganges" in the **Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal**, April 15, 1998, 6A.

23 Jackson, **The Restorer**, 7.

24 Sai'd Al-Ashmawy, "Islam's Real Agenda" in **Reader's**

Digest, Vol. 148, January 1996, 158.

25 David Jones, "Muhammadanism" in **Dangerous 'Isms** (Southaven, Ms: Southaven church of Christ, 1997), 351-352.

26 **Koran**, 34, 259.

27 F. E. Mayer, **The Religious Bodies of America** (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954, 509.

28 God is a God of goodness but also a God of severity. Several times in Scripture we read the phrase, "The anger of the Lord was kindled." The Hebrew term translated "kindled" comes from the root verb that suggests "to be heated to the point of vexation." **Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament**, Vol. 1, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 322.

29 Mary Baker Eddy, **Science and Health With a Key to the Scriptures** (Boston: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1875), 44, 361.

30 **Truth That Leads to Eternal Life**, 22-24, 52.

31 **Doctrine and Covenants** 130:22.

32 **Journal of Discourses**, Vol. 6, 3.

33 R. Lofton Hudson, **Once Saved Always Saved or Can a Person Who Has Been Saved Ever Be Lost?** Tennessee Baptist Convention.

34 Ad that appeared in **The Murray Ledger & Times**, Murray, Ky, August 17, 1987.

35 **Discipline of the Methodist Church**, 1944 ed., Article 9 (The Methodist Publishing House, 1944), 29.

36 Reggie White, Baptist minister and professional football player for the Green Bay Packers, decided to leave football because of a bad back. However, he claims while having back therapy that God spoke to him in a revelation and told him to play one more year with the Packers. Associated Press Report, "God to Reggie: Play one more year with Packers" in the **Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal**, April 23, 1998, 3B.

37 Leslie and Bernice Flynn, **God's Will: You Can Know It** (Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books, 1979), 9-10.

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(Rockville, Md: Assurance Publishers, 1979), 200.

40 Tan, **Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations**, 303.

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42 Bales, **The God-Killer?**, 14-15.

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CHAPTER 25

THE LOVE, GRACE AND MERCY OF GOD

CURTIS CATES

Introduction

LIFE IS FULL OF UNCERTAINTIES; there are difficulties, disappointments, and trials on every hand. We see around us change and transition, disease and death. Is there anything that changes not? There is something that is certain and sure—“**God is love**” (1 John 4:8). That fact is unchanging! To His children, the law of God is the very foundation of our existence, hope, and joy; there is no truth more sweet or wonderful.

God has numerous absolute attributes, among which are those termed “affections”: love is one of those affections. In fact, it is in first place, for it is His very nature—“**God is love.**” Mercy and grace, the other two aspects of this discussion are **manifestations** of that divine nature, love. The love of God is the essence of the divine nature which moves God to communicate Himself; He has feeling toward Himself and the other two persons in the Godhood, as well as to His offspring—angels and human beings.

The law of God is perfect; His love is in absolute harmony with His other infinite characteristics, such as truth, holiness, justice, severity, et al. In studying His love, and its manifestations in mercy and grace, one must never lose sight of His other absolute attributes.

God's love is superlative in every way. The Psalmist wrote, "Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise thee" (Psm. 63:3). Life is precious; the law of God is infinitely precious. And, before the sacredness of human life came about by God's creation, that which brought it about in all its glory and dignity existed—the love of God. Indeed, the love of God is what makes life worth living; otherwise, we would have only indescribable folly, misery, and despair. Indeed, He is the source of the abundant life (John 10:10)!

The Love Of God

God The Origin

The love that is revealed in the Bible originated with God. Love is not merely an attribute; He **is** love. Just as God **is** Spirit (John 4:24) and God is light (1 John 1:5), and God **is** love. Love is the very essence of God, and all of His attributes have integral connection with what God is. All that God is and does partakes of this very essence of God. And, heaven is the indescribably beautiful home of this indescribable essence of the infinite God. It is God's very nature to love. Love is coexistent and coexistensive with Him.

God's Love Of The Godhood Itself

The existence of angels and man was not necessary in order for God to carry out this divine and sacred essence. True love is impossible without feeling, thus God's ability to feel. And, He has eternally communicated that feeling to the other persons in the Godhood, who have reciprocated those feelings. "...the God of love" (2 Cor. 13:11) loves the second member of the Godhead and the third member of the Godhead. "The Father loveth the Son" (John 3:35); "For the Father loveth the Son" (John 5:20). Christ is the "beloved Son" of God

and pleased Him (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Col. 1:13). Inasmuch as the first person in the Godhead created, both physically and spiritually, through the Holy Spirit, the Father loves Him also. “The Spirit of God hath made me, And the breath of the Almighty giveth me life” (Job. 33:4). See also Psalm 33:6; John 15:26; 1 John 5:7.

The Father is loved by His only begotten Son, Christ, as well as by the Spirit. “...I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (John 14:31). In doing His Father’s will, “...he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). The Holy Spirit loves both God and Christ, for He reveals the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:10-12), and “He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you,” Christ said (John 16:14).

By the above, we see that the Godhood loves itself supremely, which is only right. The Godhood is perfect love, and perfect love finds genuine delight in the absolute perfection, nature, and works of God. Self-love in man is commanded; one is not to love his neighbor more than himself but as himself (Matt. 22:39). Of course, one is not to neglect others or to mistreat others. We learn how to treat others from our perfect examples, the Godhood. When one realizes that the Godhood has self-love and that love is reciprocated, then he sees the fact that there are three persons in the Godhead, not three “manifestations” of just one person in the Godhead, as some religionists falsely teach. And, he sees the fact that those three are distinct personalities [just as there are billions of distinct personalities (persons) who make up “manhood”]. Supreme affection, mutual happiness, oneness of mind, sameness of purpose, mutual devotion and help, devoted communion, et al., exist among these Sacred Three who make up the one Godhood. Thus, God has in eternity had the supreme object of His love, in

Himself, independent of this world and its creatures.

God Loves For What He Can Give

God's love is not motivated by the desire to get, as is often the case with man. What did the rich young ruler have that God needed or wanted? "And Jesus looking upon him loved him" (Mark 10:21). Compare Psalm 50:12, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; For the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." He loves because He chooses to love; it is a deliberate choice and flows from the very depth of His nature. He loves because He wants to **give**. He loves because His creatures' response to that love, He knows, can be to their present and eternal blessing (1 John 4:19). His love begets love in us, if we heed His affections.

God Loves His Offspring

When He made man in His image (Gen. 1:26-27), He had already made exceedingly wonderful, beautiful, perfectly adequate provisions for mankind in the luscious Garden of Eden. Everything was pronounced by God as "very good" (Gen. 1:13); indeed, God rejoiced in His works (Psm. 104:31). Not only does He sustain the physical creation, He especially loves and cares for His own offspring.

We are His offspring. Though we have "fathers [and mothers] of our flesh," God is "the Father of spirits" (Heb. 12:9). "For we are also his offspring," "the offspring of God," Paul stated (Acts 17:28-29). No animal is called a "son of God," but we human beings are sons of God. That makes us **very special**, whether already born or during our first nine months as human beings in the womb. Those who take human life in the womb are murderers of God's offspring. Where did fathers and mothers get their love for their sons and daughters? It is from God,

is it not? Now, is God less than human? No, for “he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). So, note the words of the Psalmist; “The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; But they that seek Jehovah shall not want any good thing” (Psm. 34:10). That essence of God, dear reader, is the very foundation of man’s salvation.

What a contrast is the love of God to the philosophers’ gods and to the heathens’ gods! They are made in the image of wicked human beings. They are cold, disinterested, full of hatred and anger, arbitrary and envious. Indeed, “none is good save one, even God” (Mark 10:18).

God Loves Rationally [According to Law].

Some things are impossible for even God; He can do nothing which is self-contradictory or which contradicts other elements of His nature. He cannot make a rock so heavy He cannot pick it up, or a square circle, or a spirit composed of flesh; He cannot impinge upon man’s free-moral being [which ultimately would impinge upon His own nature, since man is made in His own image]. He also cannot violate His own inherent nature of holiness. His absolute love cannot violate His absolute holiness. Therefore, His love must be subordinate to, in agreement with His standard of holiness. Our life is regulated by law; we love what God loves and hate what God hates. David hated [as must we] every false way (Psm. 119:104). Did not falsehood fly into the face of truth? God is “a jealous God” (Exod. 20:2-5); He will permit no other allegiance. That, dear reader, is His nature. He hates sin and error. Thus this qualification by the apostle Paul reads, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in **knowledge and all discernment**” (Phil. 1:9). He will not take second place either to man’s gods or to man’s

commandments (Matt. 15:9; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19). His love, and the salvation which flows from it, is regulated by His holiness, and therefore, by His law. It is not possible to be under grace while not being under law. The rule or standard of God's love is His holiness, expressed in His law. Therefore, we are under law to Christ (1 Cor. 9:21), freed from the law of sin and death by law (Rom. 8:1-2), saved by the law which would go forth from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3), to do the work in the law (Jas. 1:22-25), convicted by the law (2:9), fulfil "the royal law" (2:8), "fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), to be judged by the law of Christ (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12). God did not give His absolute standard and rule, the divine pattern in which we must walk, for the purpose of placing before liberal minds who have little appreciation for God's holiness and love something to blaspheme and ridicule; He gave it so that we would be thus conformed into His likeness and holiness: "...like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living" (1 Pet. 1:15).

Now, how do we accomplish that? It is by being "children of obedience, not fashioning according to the former lusts of your ignorance" (1:14). Now, question: of what were they ignorant? Are not His words holy (Jer. 23:9)? Just as the law of Moses was holy (Rom. 7:12), even so the law of Christ! How does a holy people maintain fellowship with a holy God? "Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13; Cf. 1 Tim. 4:6-8; Tit. 1:9-11). Why did Paul command Timothy to "keep the commandment, without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:14)? Otherwise, he would not be among those cleansed and purified by the Word to be presented to God at the last day (Eph. 5:25-27). The God who is a

giver of every good and perfect gift is regulated in His gifts by His holiness, which is expressed in “the word of truth.” “Be not deceived” by those who ridicule the Word of holiness (Jas. 1:12-18)! Never in the history of this world has God’s love been unregulated by His holiness, and therefore unregulated by law. As human beings bestow their estates by means of a last will and testament, just so will Christ bestow His great blessing of eternal life to those who have been faithful thereto (Heb. 9:14-17). That testament, dear reader, is the law of Christ. Not one person in the Christian dispensation, responsible before God, will receive eternal life in any other way; He will not, cannot violate His Word of holiness! No one who has ever snuffed at His sacred pattern of holiness will go unpunished. God’s love is not “cheap.” “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

God’s Love Requires God’s Wrath

God hates whatever separates us from the blessings of His love. Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Read about the rebellion of mankind in the Word, even that of God’s own people, and you read of the anger of God. The immutable counsel of God is “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:20). This is not the result of an arbitrary attitude, from some baseless vindictiveness. It is, rather, based upon His very nature, His holiness, and His infinite sense of justice. God’s wrath is “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hinder the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18). The hard of heart “treasureth up for thysself wrath in the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5ff). They are those who “obey not the truth” (2:8). Such rebellious persons are termed “children of

wrath” (Eph. 2:3). “He that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). Dear reader, God’s love cannot forgive even one unrequited sin. Please do not trifle with and/or expect God to violate His infinite sense of justice and His holiness by seeking for Him to save you in spite of your rebellion? Those not obeying Him are disobedient. Sometimes one expects out of God what he would not allow in his own children—a refusal to obey, which bespeaks a rejection of His authority. Read Christ’s description of eternal punishment, “unquenchable fire,” which shall befall the wicked (Mark 9:42-48; John 5:28-29; Matt. 25:46). Not only is God a God of love; He is a “consuming fire” (See 1 Thess. 1:6-9; Rev. 20:15; Matt. 13:42; Heb. 12:29; 10:31).

God loves His children, but like every good father, He never spoils His children:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, And scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. It is for chastening that ye endure: God dealteth with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father chasteneth not (Heb. 12:6-7)?

It is those who will submit to the Father’s chastening who shall live eternally with Him (Heb. 12:7-9). It is “for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness” (12:10). His love cannot save one who has not been chastened into holiness. The statement **love is blind** was not spoken of God, nor can it be. If it could be, then God could not/would not chastise His children. When has God **ever** failed to upbraid His children when they departed from His Word?

God’s Love Described

Perhaps the greatest description of God’s love is

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.” This great verse has been termed the “golden text” of the Bible; it has also been called the “gospel in miniature.”

1. It informs us the **origin** of this great love; it originated within God, for it is His very nature to love. He did not love us because we deserved it (Rom. 5:8), nor because man was/is lost [which man was/is]. He loved us because that is the way He is; He **is** love.

2. It informs us of the **magnitude** of His love; He “so” loved. He gave His only begotten Son, the greatest gift ever bestowed upon anyone. God was the person whose holiness was violated by man’s sin, His justice demanded “life for life,” punishment, and He also gave His precious Son to pay the terrible price for sin—unprecedented. Truly, He taught man how to love supremely.

3. It teaches the **reach** of God’s love—”the world.” He loved those not lovely; He loved His enemies. How unlike us, who tend to love our friends, those who love us. He meets the needs of every heart, reaches the most vile sinner, those without hope; He loved even me.

4. It teaches the **impartial nature** of God’s love—whosoever” (Rev. 22:17). The gospel is for **all**, to all alike (Matt. 5:45; 1 John 2:2; 1 Tim. 2:6; 2 Pet. 3:9; Matt. 11:28-30; Acts 2:38; Heb. 2:9; Acts 17:30; et al.).

5. It teaches the **limitations** of God’s love—“believeth.” The Greek word for believeth has two elements, trusting in Christ conjoined with obedience to Christ (Thayer; also, compare the ASV and the KJV in John 3:36). Thus, the person who refuses to trust and obey will not be saved (cf. 2 Thess. 1:6-9).

6. It teaches that recipients of God’s grace **will have eternal life** (John 14:1-6; et al.).

God's Love Brings Him Suffering

Without doubt, God was very grieved when Adam and Eve violated His divine law (Gen. 3), as His huge heart was grieved when every imagination of man's heart was only evil continually, prior to the flood (Gen. 6:6). He has long participated in the suffering of His people; "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them" (Isa. 63:9). Sin costs God; how every innocent animal whose blood was shed for sin in the Old Testament and pointed to the cross must have stabbed God to the depths of His heart, realizing that the second person in the Godhead would ultimately be shamefully crucified by wicked and lawless men!

Can anyone describe the agony when God beheld His only begotten cry out in tears in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the shadow of the Cross (Heb. 5:7) and when He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46)! Suffering, indeed! When Stephen suffered, Christ suffered (Acts 7:56). When His people suffered, were deprived, were persecuted, Christ suffered (Matt. 25:44-45; Acts 9:4-5); the same is true today. Love is self-sacrificing, and self-sacrificing is suffering. But, when love's suffering and pain is on behalf of the object(s) of its affection, it is joy. "...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Our God feels our pain, and He cares, "I know He cares!"

The Mercy Of God

Mercy is a manifestation of the love of God, as noted earlier; thus, it is not a separate attribute of His nature. It is God's desire and wish to meet the needs of and encourage the afflicted and miserable, as well as to

forgive those who have violated His very standard [which is based upon His very character]. Mercy is God's attitude of grief, pitying and demonstrating compassion toward suffering mankind. Yet, though He condescends to pity us in pain and misery, we must still appreciate the fact that He is God, the Master of the universe. He is not on man's level. James wrote concerning a major theme of the book of Job:

Behold, we call them blessed that endured: ye have heard of the patience [endurance, CAC] of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful (Jas. 5:11).

Though not fully understood by Job, God was very mindful and sympathetic to his many and grievous trials.

Mercy In The Old Testament

The passages of Scripture which affirm the mercy of God are many, throughout the Word. Note but a small number of them: God showed mercy to Joseph when he was in prison (Gen. 39:21), as he had shown to Lot in wicked Sodom (Gen. 19:16). He showed mercy to the Israelites in Egyptian bondage in delivering them (Exod. 15:13), and Jehovah proclaimed at Sinai:

Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth; keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation (Exod. 34:6-7; cf. Num. 14:18-19).

To the second generation of Israelites, Moses gave this assurance—and warning:

Know therefore that Jehovah thy God, he is God, the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and lovingkindness [mercy—CAC] with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations, and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them; he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command thee this day, to do them (Deut. 7:9-11).

The Psalmist knew he could trust in God's mercy: "But I have trusted in thy lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation" (Psm. 13:5). "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; But he that trusteth in Jehovah, lovingkindness shall compass him about" (Psm. 32:10). Obedience and mercy go together, do they not.

What about mercy and truth? "Show us thy lovingkindness, O Jehovah, And grant us thy salvation....Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him....Mercy and truth are met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed one another" (Psm. 85:7-10). His mercy is everlasting: "For his lovingkindness endureth for ever" (Psm. 118:1-4,29). "Jehovah taketh pleasure in them that fear him, In those that hope in his lovingkindness" (Psm. 147:11). Note the connection with His commandments, His Word (147:15). "Let not kindness [mercy—CAC] and truth forsake thee" (Prov. 3:3). "By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for; And by the fear of Jehovah men depart from evil" (Prov. 16:6).

Mercy In The New Testament

Let us now notice some New Testament

affirmations of God's mercy. "Because of the tender mercy of our God, Whereby the dayspring from on high [the Christ, by means of the virgin birth, John 1:14] shall visit us, To shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death; To guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79; cf. Isa. 9:1-6; Matt. 4:16). "And as many as walk by this rule [the **kanon**, the New Testament pattern], peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God [the church—CAC]" (Gal. 6:16). [Many ridicule the divine pattern, but it is through walking by it that we meet the conditions of God's mercy.]

Note the connection between God's mercy and His love. "...but God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses..." (Eph. 2:4-5). "Mercy unto you and peace and love be multiplied" (Jude 2).

Our Attitude Toward God's Mercy

What is to be our attitude toward God and His mercy? Inasmuch as God is sovereign and states "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy" (Rom. 9:15-16), therefore we must learn what His will is regarding the bestowing of His mercy. AS we learned about His love, God's mercy is granted in a way congruent with His holiness; He cannot violate His infinite justice. He cannot be bribed or coerced into bestowing lovingkindness [mercy], but we can have the attitude of the lowly publican, "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13-14; cf. Matt. 9:27; 15:22; Mark 10:47-48; et al.). Inasmuch as God's mercy is bestowed in accordance to His will, we must also submit to His commandments. And, because it is the merciful who shall obtain mercy (Matt. 5:7), we must cultivate the attitude of pitying and showing lovingkindness to others. "Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak" (Rom.

15:1-3). “Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15). “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). In addition, “Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). The mercy of God is in complete compatibility with God’s hatred of sin and with His wrath against that transgressor.

The Grace Of God

God’s Grace The Demonstration Of His Mercy

The very essence of God [love] is manifested in His divine pity and mercy toward His offspring, mankind. The demonstration of that mercy is called grace [often termed “favor” in the **American Standard Version**.] The word “grace” simply means favor. It can indicate that which human beings do for each other, or for God. But, when God’s mercy is displayed toward man, it is unmerited by man. It is a demonstration of the absolute loveliness and gracefulness and holiness of God; “Who is like unto thee, O Jehovah, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exod. 15:11). Think of the amazing, lovely view [as much as was possible for a human being] of God’s gracefulness which Moses was allowed:

And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and will proclaim the name of Jehovah before thee; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy (Exod. 33:19).

And Jehovah passed by before him, and proclaimed, Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious,

slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness
and truth (Exod. 34:6).

God's Physical Provisions

Many things are called grace in the Word, for they are sent forth from God as displays and effect of His infinite love and mercy to an unworthy, undeserving people; these things bespeak and communicate that love. God's grace is demonstrated toward man in His general providence, "for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). And, this beautiful universe, the heaven and the earth, not only provide for and sustain our physical existence, it also proclaims the marvelous existence and power of God:

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the
firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day
uttereth speech, And night unto night showeth
knowledge (Psm. 19:1-2).

That declaration of the necessity of a designer and creator is continuous; the glory of God can be seen day and night. But, there is more.

God's Inspired Revelation

God declares Himself in His Word, and that is called grace:

For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing
salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent
that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we
should live soberly and righteously and godly in
this present world (Tit. 2:11-12).

Paul told the Corinthians, "And working together

with him we entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1). The spiritual gifts which confirmed the Word (Heb. 2:3) are called grace (Rom. 12:6). The revelation of God’s grace in His Word renders man without excuse when he rejects it (Rom. 1:18-21).

God’s Gift of Salvation

God supplies man’s spiritual needs through His grace. Before He made man, His benevolent nature formulated the plan for human redemption (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:28-30). Christ in His own “eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God” in order to save us (Heb. 9:14). In the fulness of time, Christ was born of a woman, a virgin, as prophesied in the Old Testament (Gen. 3:15; Dan. 7:14; 9:6-7; Jer. 31:22; Matt. 1:18ff; John 1:1-3,14,18; Luke 1:35; Matt. 22:41-46; et al.). There was grace in the Old Testament; Noah was saved through God’s grace (Gen. 6:8). In fact, all in the Old Testament who were saved, were saved by grace; never in the history of the world **has anyone** been saved apart from the grace of God. They were forgiven in promise when they offered sacrifices, the blood of bulls and goats which pointed to the cross of Christ and to the shed blood of the Lamb of God, the innocent only begotten Son of God (Heb. 10:1-5). The grace of God is seen very clearly in this supreme sacrifice, the death of Christ on behalf of all mankind. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

When Christ died on the cross, God’s grace was manifested in the power of the blood of Christ to cleanse from every sin and its guilt (Matt. 26:28; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5-6). Inasmuch as the blood of Christ was shed in His death (John 19:34), the alien sinner contacts that cleansing power when he upon penitent belief, is immersed in water, into the death of Christ where the

blood was shed (Rom. 6:3-4). He is at that point added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:38-41,47), by the process of at that time being born of water and of the Spirit into the kingdom (John 3:3-5). He is bought, redeemed, purchased by the precious blood of the only begotten Son of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20), being a part of the blood-purchased church of Christ (Acts 20:28). Through God's grace, as one who keeps walking in the light of God's Word, the blood of Christ keeps cleansing him from sin (1 John 1:7). A crown of life awaits the faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Not Grace Alone

Some years ago, one made the statement, "It is a scandalous and outrageous lie to teach that salvation arises from human activity. We do not contribute one whit to our salvation." Others has stated that people are saved by grace alone. The writer heard a denominational preacher on radio affirm recently, "We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone." It is true that we are saved only in Christ; however, it is a self-contradiction that we are saved by grace alone and by faith alone. Never in the history of the world has a person been saved from sin except by grace, law, faith, and works of obedience. Look at Noah, a patriarch. He was saved by grace (Gen. 6:8), by faith (Heb. 11:7), by law (Gen. 6:14) and by obedience [works] (Gen. 6:22; Heb. 11:7).

Look at the Israelites, under the law of Moses. They were saved by grace (Exod. 33:12-19; et al.), by law [a law of faith, the law delivered to them by Moses, though many of them, especially at the time of Christ, sought to make it a law of "works" (Rom. 9:30-32). If the Israelites were saved by a law of works, then all can be saved by works without faith, which is legalism. Legalism is not

obedience of faith; it is obedience without faith in the cross] (Exod. 20; et al.), by faith in the coming Messiah (Rom. 9:30-33), and by works of obedience (Deut. 11:1; et al.). Under the law of faith given by Moses, works without faith was dead works [legalism], and faith without works of obedience could not save.

When those who were subject to Moses' law in the Mosaic Dispensation [the law of Moses was nailed to the cross, Col. 2:14; Rom. 7:4; 2 Cor. 3] believed in God and obeyed the ordinances of the law, that enabled God's grace to flow to them. Many were destroyed because of unbelief and/or a refusal to obey the commandments of God.

Look now at those of us under the Christian Dispensation, since Pentecost of Acts 2. Christ stated, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (John 12:32). The drawing power is the message of the cross, which produces faith (Rom. 10:17). Faith is trust in Christ conjoined with obedience. Faith [mere consent that Christ is God's Son] without works is "dead faith" (Jas. 2:18-26). It has never saved anyone, nor can it (Luke 6:46; Matt. 7:21-23; John 12:42-43,48; Heb. 5:8-9; et al.). Works of obedience without faith is legalism; that would mean that the law is by itself sufficient to save, when obeyed. But, when joyful trust in Christ is conjoined with obedience, that enables God's grace to flow (Rom. 4:16).

Of course, we have already noted that we are under law to Christ—which is necessitated by God's grace. The law of grace in this dispensation is "the law of the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2), the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21). The law of God enables Him to bestow His mercy and to prove His love. Indeed, His grace has appeared to all men, teaching us (Tit. 2:11-12). "...**where** there is no law, neither is there transgression" (Rom. 4:15). But,

where the law of grace is, there is great assurance of hope to the faithful.

Inasmuch as grace is the manifestation of the love of God, and inasmuch as you and I, dear reader, must “keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21), must we not also “keep ourselves” in the grace of God? If so, do you not think that we contribute “one whit” to our salvation. Peter knew we do when he commanded the alien sinner, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40). And did not Paul command, “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12)?

Conclusion

The great offer of salvation, God’s grace (Eph. 2:8-10), is made to all who will call upon God’s offer (Luke 14:15-24; Rom. 10:14-16). His grace is the manifestation of His mercy and pity, which comes from His very nature—God is love. But, the question is very appropriate, “Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?” There is a cross for everyone (Matt. 16:24).

As long as this writer can remember, churches of Christ have sung “Amazing Grace,” and preachers have had it as the theme of their sermons; however, they have always [if faithful] declared, as did the Christ, that grace alone does not save. Those bitten by snakes had to look upon the brazen serpent, the Israelites had to march around Jericho, Naaman had to dip seven times in the Jordan, and the blind man had to wash in the pool of Siloam. We must have obedient faith in order to receive God’s love, mercy, and grace.

CHAPTER 26

THE PATIENCE OF GOD

LENNIE REAGAN

IT IS TO THE ELDERSHIP, deacons, preachers, and the good congregation of the Southaven church of Christ that I express my grateful appreciation for hosting this lectureship on the **Godhead: A Study of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**. When mankind discovers the eternal truths about the eternal Godhead as revealed on the pages of the authoritative Word of God; then, man is properly prepared to know, believe, obey, and serve the God of the Bible. Hence, the eternal value of this lectureship.

The subject under consideration is the patience of God. As evidenced by our study of the other attributes and characteristics of God, there is a need to approach this topic in a reverent and careful manner, for we are assigning something to God. We do not seek to misrepresent the character of God and say that His patience will do and allow what it does not. On the other hand, we do not wish to deny that which God's patience is designed to allow and accomplish.

As we ponder the possibility of the patience of God there exists particular perspectives which are worthy to be petitioned. What Biblical examples portray the patience of God? Does the patience of God have any limitations? Does God ever draw the line with sinful people? We will

attempt to answer these questions as we explore the patience of God and note three specific points:

1. The declaration of God's patience.
2. The demonstration and depletion of God's patience.
3. The disinformation about God's patience.

The Declaration Of God's Patience

We are not left to wonder one minute about the existence of the patience of God for the Bible is clear and continuous in revealing the longsuffering of God. The patience of God is a relevant and repetitive theme of both the Old and New Testaments and is the esteemed exhibition of the wisdom and love of God:

And the Lord passed by before him (Moses), and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth (Exod. 34:6; All Scripture references will be taken from the King James Version).

The apostle Peter points to the palpable relationship of salvation and the patience of God: "And account that the longsuffering of the Lord is salvation..." (2 Pet. 3:15).

It is decisively difficult to discern the difference between God's mercy, goodness, and patience.¹ Zodhiates defines patience as:

a bearing up under, endurance as to things or circumstances. It is associated with hope and refers to that quality of character which does not allow one to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial; specifically, patience as a quality of mind, the bearing of evils and suffering

with tranquil mind.²

Stephen Charnock illustrates the patience of God in relationship with several descriptive attributes of Deity:

It is 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; God's slowness to anger is a branch or slip from His mercy: The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.

David Lipscomb describes the slowness of God's anger as "He bears long with the weakness, the shortcomings, the sins of His creatures." God bears with the sins of His creation so He might display His loving kindness to mankind and through obedience we may inherit life:

But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him (Rom. 5:8-9).

The longsuffering of God is visible through the loving pleading of God as He warns His children of the evil they are self-inflicting. When the congregation of Israel rebelled against the authority of God at Kadesh-Barnea, God was prompted to ask Moses: "How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me?" (Num. 14:17). God promises to punish Israel with pestilence and to destroy them, and make yet a greater nation (Num. 14:12). Moses responds as he remembers the longsuffering and the abundant goodness and mercy of God (Num. 14:17-

18). As we know, the Lord was longsuffering in His relationship with His people.

When we search for ways to describe the Infinite God, finite man is limited in that ability; but, with the application of the attributes of God revealed in the Bible we are able to view, at least in part, the essential qualities inherent in the divine nature.⁵ “An attribute of God, therefore, means the quality which is essentially an expression of the very being of God.”⁶ Attributes describe what God does in His relationship to mankind. These are sometimes identified as the moral attributes of God.⁷ The attributes of God are more than a characteristic, for a characteristic may be either inherent or acquired.⁸ The words of Benjamin Warfield make the connection for us in regard to God, His essence, and His attributes:

We cannot separate the essence and the attribute. Where the essence is, there the attributes are; they are merely the determinates of the essence. And where the attributes are, there the essence is; it is merely the thing, of the kind of which they are the determinants.⁹

The works of God, as revealed in God’s Word, clearly identify the everlasting attributes of God;¹⁰ therefore, as eternal and everlasting as God is (Deut. 33:27; Psm. 90:2), so are His attributes.

But what is the impact of this information? Before Genesis 1:1 was there a definite declaration of the longsuffering God? Rex A. Turner, Sr., sets the stage with these words:

God was faced with a real dilemma with respect to the creation of man, as follows: God could not create a rational being that would continue to be absolutely sinless; further God could not, by

His own righteous nature, clear the guilty. In short, when God created man, He not only knew the possibility and probability of man's fall; but also, He knew the certainty of it; and further, He knew that His holy nature would not allow a single violation of justice to go unrequited. Within that dilemma of circumstances, God created man.¹¹

The declaration of God's longsuffering was echoed within the hallowed Godhead as a plan, a scheme of redemption was developed before man was created. This plan was God's divine solution to what appeared as a dilemma in view of the certainty of man's sin and the fact of the absolute justice of God in that He could and would not clear the guilty. The apostle Paul provides both a precious and powerful promise and an inspired commentary of the plan of redemption:

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. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, then He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, then He also glorified (Rom. 8:29-30).

Robert Taylor, Jr., identifies these verses as the Scheme of Human Redemption. God knew before He created man that man would sin. God planned or proposed, before He created man, that if fallen man were to be raised from the fallen, sinful state man would obediently conform to the image of Christ. Mankind has been and is still today called by the gospel message (2 Thess. 2:14). Those who obey the gospel are saved, justified, and will one day be glorified in the predetermined manner by the

foreknowledge and longsuffering of God.

In a sermon preached at Southaven church of Christ, B. J. Clarke, one of the illustrious preachers, described this scheme or plan of redemption as “motivated by God’s infinite love; it was developed through His infinite wisdom, and it was executed by His infinite power.” For our purpose, if we may be so bold, we could add to this statement that this plan of redemption was not only motivated by God’s infinite love, developed through His infinite wisdom, and executed by His infinite power; but, it also was perpetuated by His infinite patience. Because man’s sin separated him from God, there was and still exists, to this very minute, a spiritual gap between God and lost humanity. Hence, the declaration of the patience of God.

The Demonstration And Depletion Of The Patience Of God

As the apostle Paul writes to the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 3:8-12, he reminds them of the distinctive value and voice of the gospel of Christ. Paul portrays the church as the great missionary institution as the proclaimers of the patience of God. Through obedience to the message, which the Lord’s church proclaims, the world can know that “the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Pet. 3:15). Paul pens:

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints,
is this grace given, that I should preach among
the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;
And to make all men see what is the fellowship
of the mystery, which from the beginning of the
world hath been hid in God, who created all
things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now
unto the principalities and powers in heavenly

places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him" (Eph. 3:8-12).

In this segment of scripture, Paul affirms the tremendous task assigned to the church by the patience of God; but he also gives a divine view of the relationship between the church and salvation. When ignorant and imprudent men sneer at the essentials of the church toward salvation they mock the patience of God. It is this concept of the church and salvation which causes us to rejoice in the demonstration of the longsuffering of God.

The book of Genesis is the book of beginnings. Among the many "beginnings" in Genesis is the first recorded demonstration of God's patience as He endures the sin of His creation. In the midst of God addressing each of the guilty parties we find the unfolding patience of God: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Gen. 3:15). The shadow of Calvary's cross was visible in the eclipse of Eden's sin as a demonstration of God's patience.

In Genesis 6:3, the words of inspiration provide a depiction of the demonstration and depletion of God's longsuffering toward sinful men: "And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his day shall be an hundred and twenty years" (Gen. 6:3). The divine record of man's spiritual condition (Gen. 6:5-7), provides proof positive that at the time God made this statement (Gen. 6:3), there existed enough evil and sin that God would have been justified if He had destroyed the earth.

God's patience promised that He would strive with man yet longer; but, God was not going to strive with man forever. One day time would be up and God would judge man. God commanded Noah to build an ark, and during the time from the promise of God to destroy the earth and the fulfillment of that promise, Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). Noah proclaimed the patience of God as he pronounced the way men could be saved from the destruction of the earth. He was preaching the mercy and grace of God for the period of time God would strive with men in preparation for the time God would no longer strive with sinful men.

This is no isolated incident. For the pages of Genesis reveal another demonstration and depletion of the patience of God. In Genesis 15, God makes His covenant with Abraham. God promises Abraham that he will have as many heirs as there are stars in the heavens (Gen. 15:5). God promises Abraham that his descendants will inherit the land of Canaan; but, it will not happen right now. First, his children will spend 400 years in a land that is not theirs. While in this land they will be afflicted; but, God will judge that strange nation and the descendants of Abraham will come out from them with great substance (Gen. 15:14). In the fourth generation God will bring the children of Abraham to this promised land.

But why does it not happen right now? "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16). In other words, the Amorites and all the people who then possessed the land, were given some 400 years to repent,. At the time that God made the promise to Abraham, their sins were not yet full: God gave them four hundred years to repent before He judged them. The patience of God is long, His wrath is slow; but the wrath of God is just as sure as His Word.

The New Testament offers another delineation of the demonstration and depletion of God's patience. The words of John the revelator reveal a vision:

And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the last seven plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God (Rev. 15:1).

The last phrase of this verse is of special importance to our study; for, whatever these plagues may be, they contain the fullness of the wrath of God against those to whom the plagues were applied. The wrath of God is plainly and with specific purpose identified by inspiration in this verse. However, there is an aspect of this verse which is worthy of consideration: “. . .for in them is **filled up** the wrath of God” (Rev. 15:1). The design of the “filling up” of the wrath of God is that God had allowed their sins to “pile up” until a point that the wrath of God is “filled up.” When the patience of God has become devoured, He will punish and bring His wrath upon them.

The Biblical accounts of the patience of God convince us that God is longsuffering: His patience is sure. The depletion of God's patience serves to remind us that He is just: God's wrath is sure. Yet, in each of the elucidative examples, there is a common thread representative of the loving nature of God. God gave space for men to repent. Why? Could it be that God does not want to judge and bring His wrath upon any man? God does not want any man to be lost. What does John journalize?

For God so loved **the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (emp. mine, LR) (John 3:16).

What does Acts 17:30 articulate? “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth **all men** everywhere to repent” (emp. mine, LR). What does 1 Timothy 2:3-4 tell us? “God. . .will have **all men** to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”(emp. mine, LR). What does Titus 2:11 teach us? “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to **all men**” (emp. mine, LR). We can truthfully affirm: “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation. . .” (2 Pet. 3:15). God does not want one person to be lost! Yet, the majority of men refuse and reject the revelation of God’s grace (Matt. 7:13-14). That reality, however, does not relieve Christians of the burden of God’s heart and that burden is in our hands to affect the teaching of the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20). But does the patience of God negate the justice of God?

The Disinformation About God’s Patience

The patience of God, and its related topics, have not escaped the deluge of men’s opinions. The arguments and pseudo-teachings are varied from the willfully ignorant to the untaught. In his article, “The Longsuffering of God,” Guy N. Woods summarizes the condition of “present day” arguments and disinformation about God’s patience:

It is a fact long ago recognized by students of apologetics. . .that the usual arguments today against the divine religion were, for the most part, formulated within two hundred years of the close of the apostolic age. The objections heard today, with but few exceptions, are old arguments in slightly revamped form, and clothed in the terminology of our time. Present-day skeptics are greatly indebted—an obligation they do not, however, acknowledge—to the early enemies of Christianity for the ammunition with which they

still seek to demolish her strongholds.

We will consider two of such early “foundational” arguments and feigned views of the patience and judgment of God. In Jeremiah 8:18, we read a portrait of the prophet’s pain: “When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me.” Jeremiah is broken hearted over the adulterous apostasy in Judah and the recalcitrant and rebellious Jerusalem. God’s people had become disobedient and God saw them as “backsliding children” (Jer. 3:22). They had heard the call of God pleading for their repentance; yet, they refused (Jer. 4:22). God’s people had been deceived by her pseudo-prophets and lusted after their false message:

They have belied the Lord, and said, It is not He; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine: And the prophets shall become wind, and the Word is not in them: thus shall it be done unto them (Jer. 5:12-13).

The people rejected God, His Word, and His ways. They sought refuge in their idolatrous affections and refused to relinquish the whoredom that is characteristic of a departure from God (Jer. 3:1-5).

This sick, weak, and dying spiritual condition of Judah promoted Jeremiah to ask his fellow country men: “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?” (Jer. 8:22). God’s people had rejected both the balm (God’s truth) and the Physician (God). There could be no spiritual recovery when the medicine and the Physician had been rejected. Had the nation of God’s people applied the spiritual balm of God’s Word they would have recovered and they would not have gone into Babylonian captivity.

The false prophets cried, “Peace, peace. . .” The

inhabitants of Judah continued in their sinful practices and they refused to hear the sober warning of Jeremiah as he revealed the repetitive reality of God's judgment. The information of the false prophets was tainted, the pleas of repentance went unheeded. The patience of God was long; but, judgment came just as God had promised.

The New Testament is equipped with examples which establish the reliability of God's promises. The apostle Peter reminds us of the ploy of men who will forget the past prophetic proclamations and the commandments of the Lord and His apostles (2 Pet. 3:1-2). Peter exposed the error of the early day uniformitarians with these words:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men (2 Pet. 3:3-7).

When is Christ coming? These skeptical scoffers were willingly ignorant of the power of God and of the immanent relationship of God with his creation. They denied the power of God in creation; they denied the active presence and power of God in the flood and they ignored the past promises and preaching of the apostles pertaining to the second coming of Christ.

Sadly, men today are following the example of these scoffers. Humanity is bent on living a lifestyle separate from the past promises of God and the preaching of the apostles. The focus of men today is individualism. The mind of man has evolved into an attitude of ease and self dependence and security. God, His Word, His church, His promises, and His patience have been wished out of existence by many. Those who travel the broad way (Matt. 7:13-14), are saying loud and clear, “Where is the promise of His coming? We see the blue skies and the sunshine—no problems. Peace, peace, all is well!” Hear the sober reminder of God’s longsuffering:

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. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, 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. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless (2 Pet. 3:8-14).

Conclusion

God does not want men to know His wrath. The patience of God is visible through God's plan for man's redemption. The plan includes the greatest exhibition of love that the world has ever and will ever know and that is revealed in the bloody sacrifice of Christ as he yielded to the cross and died as an innocent man in my stead. Jesus wants to rescue all men from the stench of sin.

The patience of God has been declared in His eternal purpose. Biblical examples show God's patience being demonstrated and depleted. Because we understand the disinformation permeating the provision of God's patience and ". . . knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). We can face the challenges of evangelism with great confidence for we ". . . account the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (2 Pet. 3:15). The fulness of God's revelation to man stands as a constant reminder of God's patience and longsuffering with sinful men.

Endnotes

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13 Robert R. Taylor, Jr., **Studies in Romans**, (Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1996), p. 151.

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CHAPTER 27

THE PERSONALITY AND DIVINITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

MICHAEL HATCHER

Introduction

I *DEEM IT AN HONOR* and privilege to be a participant in this year's lectureship. A study of Deity and the divine nature is certainly needful and appropriate:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent (John 17:3).

A study of the Holy Spirit is especially important in this study because of the numerous misconceptions concerning Him. In fact, this is one of the misconceptions: Is the Spirit a Him or is the Spirit an it?

Jehovah Witnesses have taught that the Spirit is simply a force or power, but there is no person or personality associated with the Spirit:

The Bible's use of 'holy spirit' indicates that it is a controlled force that Jehovah God uses to accomplish a variety of his purposes. To a certain extent, it can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety

of operation....No the holy spirit is not a person and it is not part of a Trinity. The holy spirit is God's active force that he uses to accomplish his will. It is not equal to God but is always at his disposition and subordinate to him."¹

Rutherford wrote:

The holy spirit is not a person and is therefore not one of the gods of the trinity....the holy spirit is the holy power of Jehovah God conferred upon his beloved Son and upon others whom he authorized to represent him.²

Others do not know what to think concerning the Spirit. The term *Spirit* or the KJV's usage of *Ghost* conjures up all sorts of speculations concerning Him (almost to the point of some Casper the Ghost type thinking). If we understand that the Spirit is a person, then what type of a person? Is He divine as is God the Father and God the Son? These and other questions need to be studied and we appreciate the Power Lectures for this great undertaking.

Personality Of The Holy Spirit

The Bible always speaks of the Spirit using the masculine personality. The Bible speaks of the Spirit using the masculine gender and singular number (Him), but not with the neuter gender (it). This gives us the indication that the Spirit is a person—not a thing, power, or force.

He Has Personal Actions

The Bible sets forth actions that the Spirit performs that cannot be said of a force, power, or thing. Paul reveals that the Holy Spirit **speaks**. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from

the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1). As a Being that speaks, we also find that a part of that speaking involves **teaching**. Jesus tells the apostles that He is going to send the Holy Spirit unto them. The Spirit would teach them all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:26).

In that teaching the Spirit was going to guide the apostles and us through the Word which the apostles spoke and wrote:

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:13).

Paul had decided to return to those congregations he had established on his first missionary journey to see how they were doing. This was the background of his second missionary journey:

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not (Acts 16:6-7).

Here we observe the Spirit **forbidding** Paul first to go into Asia to proclaim God’s message and then forbidding

him to go into Bithynia. It would be possible for a power or force to forbid going certain places in certain ways. However in this incident we do not have the type of situation where it is a force or power forbidding Paul. What we discover here is a purpose in forbidding Paul to go into Asia and Bithynia so that He could send him to another place. "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9). A power, force, or thing cannot forbid and then **lead** in this way. This is the action of a person, not a thing.

Next consider that the Holy Spirit **searches**. Paul writes, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). It takes a mind or a thinking process to search. To search is something that cannot be done by a thing.

In this same verse, Paul also informs us that the Holy Spirit reveals. He is revealing the deep things of God by searching the mind of God. Paul also informs us that the Spirit is revealing the mystery of Christ:

Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph. 3:4-5).

The Spirit kept things hidden prior to the time of Christ. He was **revealing** the things of Christ in prophecy and in types, but the prophets did not have a full understanding of what they prophesied (1 Pet. 1:10-12). A force, power, or thing cannot reveal anything to anyone. But here we have even more than just revelation. Here the Spirit showed **intelligence, planning, and intention**

by keeping this mystery (something that was hidden but has now been revealed) until the specific time that had been planned to reveal it. The only one that can do this is a person. Thus, the Spirit is a person.

The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26).

Vines says of *intercession*, “to make a petition or intercede on behalf of another.”³ The only one that can make a petition for someone else and thus intercede for them is a person. Thus, we can be assured that the Holy Spirit is a person.

The beloved physician Luke reveals that the Spirit **gives comfort**:

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied (Acts 9:31).

To give comfort the Spirit uses the Word of God. “Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18). “These words” are the words that the Holy Spirit directed Paul to write (1 Cor. 2:9-13; 14:37) concerning those saints who have died in the Lord. While a thing could possibly give comfort to an individual because of the way we feel about it, it cannot do so in this way. The Spirit is giving comfort through the medium of words. This is the action of an individual, not a thing.

He Has Personal Traits

In addition to having personal actions, the Spirit is described as having personal traits. It is because of these traits that the Spirit can act in the previous ways. First, the Spirit has a **mind**. Paul writes, “And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:27). Some might want to claim that animals have a mind, thus this does not prove that the Spirit is an individual. However, it cannot be said that a thing, force, power, wind, or breath has mind. These things must be controlled by mind, but they themselves do not have such. Then the type of traits associated with the mind of the Spirit shows that the Spirit is not simply an animal.

The Spirit has **knowledge**. Paul reveals, “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11). As the Spirit searches all things including the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10), He learns and comes to a knowledge of these things so He can reveal them by inspiration to the apostles (1 Cor. 2:13) and by their written record to us (Eph. 3:3-5). This type of knowledge is only found in a person.

The Spirit has a **will** or the **power of volition**. One of the errors Paul tries to correct in writing to the church at Corinth concerns spiritual gifts. Some brethren thought they were superior to others and were thus haughty because of the gift they possessed. Paul teaches them the vital lesson that each Christian is important. Regarding the miraculous gifts Paul points out that they had no reason to be haughty because (among other reasons) the Spirit gave these to the ones whom He chose. “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Cor. 12:11). The Spirit had the power of choice or will in what gift He gave to

each person. He made a decision to give one spiritual gift to one person and not to another, for example He give tongues or wisdom to one person and not give them to another person but instead give that person maybe the gift of healing or some other gift. Thus, this is the exercise of the will or choice. This is the trait of a person, not a force, power, or thing.

The Spirit has **affections** that can only be associated with a person. “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in *your* prayers to God for me” (Rom. 15:30). Here the Holy Spirit is said to love. Yet, love is an emotion and affection that things or a force or power cannot possess. Let us see the wind love, or a thing such as a podium, couch, fan, or some other object possess this type of affection. We know that nonliving entities cannot have affections.

Then the Spirit is one with whom we have **fellowship**. As Paul ends his second letter to the Corinthian brethren he writes, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:14). Paul also writes, “If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies” (Phil. 2:1). The words “communion” and “fellowship” both come from the Greek *koinonia*. This word has reference to having “joint participation, association, participation with, partnership, or the share we have with another.” By its very nature we can only have fellowship (in its true definition) with a person. Consider also how that Paul associates the fellowship of the Spirit with the affections in Philippians 2:1. In that fellowship there is consolation or exhortation found in Christ, there is comfort that we receive because of the love one has for others and they have for us. There

are also “bowels” associated with the Spirit. “Bowels” is the Greek *splagchnon* and is literally the intestines, heart, liver, etc. However, it is used as the seat of emotions and by the Hebrews as the seat of tender affections such as kindness, tenderness, benevolence, compassion, etc. Then mercies, which is compassion or pity, are associated with our fellowship of the Spirit. All of these are affections that can only be associated with a person. Things do not possess and cannot have a part in these qualities.

Finally, the Scriptures affirm that the Spirit is **good**. The sweet singer of Israel (David) implored Jehovah to, “Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness” (Psm. 143:10). In this entreaty David reveals the trait of the Spirit’s being good. As the Levites rehearsed God’s goodness to the Jews, they remind the people that God “gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldst not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst” (Neh. 9:20). One of the blessings they received from God was instruction. The way God instructed them was by giving the Spirit to holy men who spoke by the Spirit’s guidance (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Levites described the Spirit that was guiding these holy men as good. All of these traits lead us to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is a person.

He Suffers Sights And Injuries

Jesus had just healed one who was possessed with a demon. When the Pharisees heard it, they claimed that Jesus did this by the power of Beelzebub the prince of the demons. Jesus proceeds to show the impossibility of his casting out demons by Beelzebub. He then warns the Pharisees by saying, “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy **against** the *Holy* Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men” (Matt. 12:31). Thus, the Spirit can be

blasphemed. To blaspheme is defined by Strong's as: "1) slander, detraction, speech injurious, to another's good name; 2) impious and reproachful speech injurious to divine majesty."⁴ By the usage of this word Jesus shows us that the Spirit is a person and that He is God.

We next find that the Spirit can be **lied to**. In the early church we observe the charitable nature of its members:

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need (Acts 4:34-35).

Apparently, one couple wanted the honor that came with doing this; thus they sold a possession and brought some of the money to the apostles. They made the claim that the money they brought was the entire price of the land, however it was only a part of the price. They were going to keep the rest of the money for themselves. "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back **part** of the price of the land?" (Acts 5:3). As a result of this lie both Ananias and his wife Sapphira were put to death by God.

After this event, Stephen was preaching in the synagogue while performing great miracles. The men of that synagogue "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:10). They induced men to claim that he was blaspheming leading the people to seize him and bring him before the council. Stephen was able to make a defense for himself. He preached a powerful sermon, but realized it was falling on deaf ears. He then makes a sudden change in nature of his lesson

and says, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51). Since Stephen was being led by the Spirit in what he said and they refused to hear his message, they were **resisting** the Spirit.

Paul reveals that the Holy Spirit can be **grieved**. “And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).

By looking to what precedes, and to what follows, we may see what it is that grieves the Spirit of God. In the previous verses it is intimated that all lewdness and filthiness, lying, and corrupt communications that stir up filthy appetites and lusts, grieve the Spirit of God. In what follows it is intimated that those corrupt passions of bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, and malice, grieve this good Spirit.⁵

Only a person possesses this type of grief.

We then observe that the Spirit can be **quenched**. Paul gives the admonition, “Quench not the Spirit” (1 Thess.5:19). This is given in the midst of several admonitions to others. Beginning in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 Paul gives views first toward God, then toward Jesus. Next he gives a view of elders and then toward others. Last, he gives eight admonitions toward self. It is during this section he warns us not to quench, suppress, or stifle the Spirit. This admonition was given during the miraculous age and apparently some were trying to prohibit the Spirit doing His work in revealing the will of God to man. However, this could only be stated if the Spirit is a person.

The Spirit can also be **despised**:

Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye,

shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:29).

The Hebrews letter was written because Christians were leaving Christ and going back into Judaism. He reminds them that those who transgressed Moses' law died without mercy. Those who despise (treat with contempt or insult) Christ, His law, and salvation will receive greater or severer punishment. This type of insult could only take place against a person, thus the Spirit is a person.

Divinity Of The Holy Spirit

Seeing that the Holy Spirit is a person, we must also give consideration to His nature. Is He God? We will see that the answer to this question is a definitive, Yes!

He Has All The Traits And Prerogatives Of God

God is **eternal**. Before time existed, there was eternity; after time ceases, there will be eternity. Man comes into existence when he is born into this world. God existed before time began—in eternity. "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen" (Psm. 41:13 cf., Psm. 106:48). "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Psm. 90:2). This is the import of John's statement concerning the Word as he begins his book. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The Word existed prior to the beginning of time. The Scriptures also affirm that the Spirit is eternal. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered

himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:14).

God is **omniscient**. This means that God is all-knowing or knows everything. John reveals, “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things” (1 John 3:20). John also testifies that the Christ is all-knowing. “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25). Paul reveals to us that the Spirit of God is omniscient:

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11).

The Spirit knows all things, even the deep things of God and is thus able to reveal God’s nature to man.

God is **omnipotent**. Omnipotent means all-powerful. Job expresses this trait of God, “Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee” (Job 42:1-2). Only an all-powerful being could do every thing, thus Jehovah is omnipotent. Paul said of Jesus:

Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:1-3).

By Jesus’ powerful word, He is able to uphold all

things. However, the Spirit possesses this same trait. Micah reveals that he received his power from the Spirit. “But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin” (Mic. 3:8). Paul reveals that he is able to perform miracles by the Spirit’s power. “Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:19).

God, to be God, must also be **omnipresent**, present in every place. Solomon points out, “The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Pro. 15:3). In the sermon on the mount three times Jesus declares that “thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18). This was a vivid way of showing that God sees every place and there is no place that is hid from His eyes. The Psalmist David declares the same thing about the Spirit. “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” (Psm. 139:7). In the next few verses he shows that there is no escape from the presence of the Spirit:

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works;

and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them (Psm. 139:8-16).

Last, God is **truth**. Jesus described Satan as a liar:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

Whereas truth comes from God, Jesus prayed to the Father, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Jesus bore witness to the truth:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth....For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ....Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 1:14, 17; 14:6).

The Scriptures also attest to the fact that the Spirit is also truth:

Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth

with you, and shall be in you (John 14:17).

Jesus uses this phrase “Spirit of truth” two other times to refer to the Holy Spirit (John 15:26; 16:13). John says that the Spirit is truth. “This is he that came by water and blood, **even** Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6). Any trait or prerogative which Deity (God) possesses, the Holy Spirit possesses, therefore the Holy Spirit is Deity (God).

He Does The Works Of God

As opposed to the falsehood of the hypothesis of evolution; God is the Creator of the world. Yet, the Holy Spirit was involved in the **creation process**. Moses wrote:

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light (Gen. 1:2-3).

Job also taught that the Spirit had a part in the creation. “By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent” (Job 26:13).

John teaches, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). John identifies the Word as the second person of the Godhead—Jesus of Nazareth. Identifying Him as the Word shows that He is the revealer of truth. Yet, the Holy Spirit also had a part to play in the **revelation** of truth. “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). Even during the Old Testament period the Holy Spirit was taking part in revelation:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

The only way the Spirit could accomplish this is if He was/is God.

God has always worked in the affairs of man. At times He worked by directly overruling natural laws, performing a miracle. At other times He controlled and used natural law to accomplish His purpose. The Holy Spirit is involved in both of these. The apostles **worked miracles** by the power of the Holy Spirit. “God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?” (Heb. 2:4). In 1 Corinthians 12 (verses 4-11) Paul states that the Spirit is the One who gives the various miraculous gifts to men. In discussing what God does for the beast the Psalmist teaches us that the Holy Spirit also has a part in the **providence** of God. “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth” (Psm. 104:30). Since the Spirit is working relating to the work of God in both miracles and providence, the Spirit must be God.

The **salvation** of man from sins resides in God. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). The “gift of God” refers to salvation, not faith as some teach. Jesus certainly played an important role in the salvation of man by dying on the cross for the sins of man. However, the Spirit has a part in salvation. Within the regeneration process, Jesus taught that the Spirit is involved. “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the

kingdom of God” (John 3:5). “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). Since it is the Spirit that renews us; the Spirit must be God.

Last, the Spirit is involved in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11). Only God would have the ability to raise someone from the dead, thus the Spirit is God.

His Name Is Used With God

In John the Baptist’s ministry, he was baptizing in the Jordan River. Jesus, at the start of His ministry, came to John to be baptized of him. At first John refused, instead desiring to have Jesus baptize him. However, Jesus said it was important for him to be baptized to “fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Upon this John baptized Jesus. At this time we observe all three divine beings comprising the Godhead:

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:16-17).

We have the Second person of the Godhead, Jesus, being baptized; The First person of the Godhead, the Father, confessing Jesus as His Son; and the Third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, descending like a dove upon Jesus. If the Spirit is not God, divine, then why is

He associated with the Father and Son in this way? The only reasonable answer is that He is God.

As Jesus gives His apostles the great commission He commands them to take the gospel to every creature. To make disciples of individuals we must teach them to observe all that Jesus had taught and baptize them. Jesus said:

Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Matt. 29:19-20, ASV).

The definite article appears before each of the three—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This shows that there are three distinct persons and not three manifestations of one person. Not three Gods, but one God with three divine Persons. With the phrase “into the name” we have a relationship into which we are baptized. It would be inconsistent for Jesus to affirm that we are baptized into a relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, if all three do not possess the same nature.

Acts 5:3-4

Certain members of the early church, to help other Christians who were in need, would sell certain possessions (lands) and give the money to the apostles for distribution to be made to those in need (Acts 4:32-37). Apparently, Ananias and Sapphira desired to receive the honor that others had received when they brought their money and gave it to the apostles. They sold a piece of land and brought a part of the money to the apostles. Peter asked if they had sold the land for that amount. Ananias (and later Sapphira) said that they had sold it for that amount:

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God (Acts 5:3-4).

Twice Peter says that Ananias has lied. The first time Peter says that Ananias has lied to the Holy Spirit. The second time he is very specific that Ananias has not lied to men but to God. Thus the Holy Spirit is not a man, but He is God.

Conclusion

While some falsely teach that the Holy Spirit is simply a force, power, or thing, the Scriptures clearly show that the Spirit is a being with the same nature as the Father and Son. He is God.

Endnotes

1 “The Holy Spirit—God’s Active Force, **Should You Believe in the Trinity?**, (Watchtower Bible And Track Society of Pennsylvania, 1989), pp. 20, 23.

2 J. F. Rutherford, **Reconciliation**, (Brooklyn, 1928), pp. 115-116.

3 Vine, W. E., **Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.

4 **Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon**, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.

5 Henry, Matthew, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible**, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1991, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.

CHAPTER 28

THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

KEITH MOSHER, SR.

THE WORD OF GOD existed (is) from all eternity (John 1:1). Yet in commenting on the Word of John 1:1, the editor (editors?) of *Let God Be True* notes:

In John chapter 1, he is spoken of as being the Word of God, that is to say, the mouthpiece or representative speaker for God....Being a mighty one and holding the high official capacity as Logos and being before all other creatures, he was God, but not the Almighty God who is Jehovah. This distinction is shown in the *Emphatic Diaglott*...interlinear translation (therefore not an authority, K. M.) of the Greek, word for word, makes the distinction between Jehovah as “God” and the Logos as “God” still clearer, reading as follows: “In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with god, and a god was the Word. This was in the beginning with God.” Happily the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (published in 1950) renders John 1:1-2: “Originally the Word was, and the Word was with god, and the Word was a god. This one was originally with god.” Thus the Word of Logos came into existence long before one of God’s other creatures made a devil out of himself....¹

It will be the purpose of this study to set forth the Biblical proposition that the Word was not “a god” but eternal Deity, pre-existing with and in the Godhead. The Word did not “come into existence”² but is from everlasting to everlasting (Mic. 5:2).³

Biblical Consideration

Perhaps, in this “scientific age” it may seem amusing to some minds to speak of an eternal being. Evolutionists are fond of labeling such thinking as “myth” or “superstition.”⁴ But for those who are serious about considering the unique figure in all history, the superior teacher of all time, faultless one of the ages, then what the Bible records about the Word (i.e. Christ) must be studied soberly:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1,14a).

Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58).

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was (John 17:5).

But to us there is but one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ. By whom are all things and we by him (1 Cor. 8:6).

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:6-7).

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by him were all things created. . . And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Col. 1:15-16a, 17).

Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world (Heb. 1:2).

I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22:13).

One statement of the Word concerning His pre-existence is so clear it cannot be misunderstood: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (John 16:28). Lanier notes on John 16:28:

Just as surely as his leaving the world and going to the Father means that he was first in the world before going back to the Father, so his coming from the Father to come into the world means that he existed with the Father in heaven before he came to the world by birth of Mary in Bethlehem.⁵

An unusual confirmation of the pre-existence of the Christ is at John 12:41. (If the discerning Bible student notices a number of references here to John’s account, it is that John had to deal with those who were teaching a “non-fleshly Christ” or a “created Christ,” that is, agnostics.) John writes: “These things said Esaias (Isaiah, K. M.)

when he saw his glory, and spake of him.” Whom did Isaiah see? The context of John 12:23-50 concerns the Christ, the living Word. Isaiah, it is recorded, saw Christ’s “glory.” When did Isaiah see that glory? Note Isaiah 6:1-3:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the six seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face; and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

After Isaiah saw the vision of “glory,” he was told to go to the people (Isa. 6:9-10), and the words of Isaiah’s message are repeated in John 12:36-40 as indicating the Christ! The “Lord,” whom Isaiah saw sitting on a throne of glory, was the Logos or pre-existent Word! That Lord is the same One who existed when Isaiah prophesied: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord. . .” (Isa. 40:3a). Both Matthew and Mark refer to that ancient prophecy as of the Christ (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3).

The Bible by explicit statement and implication-such as Christ’s reference to being “I Am” (John 8:24, 58), which is indicative of eternity-teaches the pre-existence of Christ. He is seen as pre-existent in His works, creating all that ever was created. (Thus, not created Himself, Col. 1:15-17); in the prophecies concerning Him as noted above; and in the titles or names given Him: He is “Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 22:12-13); “Progenitor” (Author) of Salvation (Heb. 5:9); The “Image” (effulgence, ASV) of God (Heb. 1:3); “Son” (John 5:19-23); “Only-Begotten” (John 3:16-the context here demands “only-begotten,” since John is

concerned with the specialness of Deity and the Virgin Birth of the pre-existing Logos. Christ was the Word in His pre-existent state, not the Son until the incarnation: Luke 1:35; John 1:1), and “Lord” (John 20:28—Thomas confesses, as a Jew, the absolute Deity of the Christ; cf. Deut. 6:4, the *shema* of the Israelites!).⁶

A Restoration Discussion

Barton W. Stone believed, and taught, that the Christ was not the second person of the Godhead who became incarnate (cf. John 1:14).⁷ Stone writes:

That Jesus Christ was the Son of God, that he existed with the Father before creation, and was the agent by whom God made the world, and without whom was nothing made that was made, is a doctrine we firmly believe—that he was sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world—that the Father prepared a body for him—that he took flesh and blood, or was made flesh—that he lived, died, and ascended to the Father, before the world was—this we most assuredly believe. But *how* and *when* he became the Son of God before creation, we are not informed.⁸

Stone did not feel that “opinions” about Christ’s pre-existent state should be made tests of fellowship,⁹ but his teaching elicited a loving, if reluctant response from Alexander Campbell.¹⁰ Campbell’s missive to those who had questions about a pre-created Christ is an interesting examination of why the Holy Spirit chose the term *logos* to describe the pre-existent state of Christ.¹¹ Campbell writes concerning John 1:1:

There was no Jesus, no Messiah, no Christ, no Son of God, no Only Begotten, before the reign of Augustus Caesar. The relation that was

before the Christian era, was not that of a son and a father, terms which always imply disparity; but it was that expressed by John in the sentence under consideration. The relation was that of God and the “word of God.” This phraseology unfolds a relation quite different from that of a father and son—a relation perfectly intimate, equal, and glorious.¹²

Campbell postulated that no human relationship could adequately portray the Saviour’s and the Father’s, since that relationship was “uncreated and unoriginated.”¹³ Therefore, Campbell surmised, the Holy Spirit chose a term which could give some view of Christ’s original dignity, and the Holy Spirit chose the premier and most suitable term—*logos* or *word*.¹⁴ Campbell then asked, “. . . what sort of relationship does this term represent?”¹⁵ Then by reflecting on *word* as the term chosen by the Holy Spirit, Campbell proceeded to note five ideas:

1st A word is a sign or representative of a thought or an idea, and is the idea in an audible or visible form.

2nd All men think or form ideas by means of words or images; so that no man can think without words or symbols of some sort.

3rd Hence it follows that the word and the idea which it represents are co-etaneous, or of the same age of antiquity. . . .

4th The word and the idea are nevertheless distinct from each other, though the relation between them is the nearest known on earth. An idea cannot exist without a word, nor a word without an idea.

5th He that is acquainted with the word, is acquainted with the idea, for the idea is wholly in the word.¹⁶

Campbell then concluded:

As a word is an exact image of an idea, so is “The Word” an exact image of the invisible God. As a word cannot exist without an idea, nor an idea without a word, so God never was without “The Word,” nor was “The Word” without God; or as a word is of equal age, or co-etaneous with its idea, so “The Word” and God are co-eternal. As an idea does not create its word nor a word its idea; so God did not create “The Word,” nor the “Word” God. . . . These views place us on a lofty eminence whence we look down upon the Calvinistic ideas of “eternal filiation,” “eternal Generation,” “eternal Son,” as midway betwixt us and Arianism. . . . It is true, indeed, I have held the idea for sixteen years that Jesus is called the Son of God, not because of an “eternal generation,” but because he was born as the angel described to Mary.¹⁷

Campbell’s interesting insight seems to correspond to Luke’s declaration:

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

The Greeks used *logos* (word) to mean a principle of reason that held order in the world.¹⁸ Heraclitus of Ephesus, the “weeping philosopher,” maintained that *logos* was the flux or flow of the world which he also identified with reason.¹⁹ But John’s use of *logos* seems not to be Grecian, since John uses the term of a person not some concept of thought.²⁰ Contrary to the authors of *Let God*

Be True above, the Person of the Christ existed from all eternity, according to John 1:1! Jackson exclaims on John 1:1 and 1:14:

There is an interesting contrast between the *eternal existence* of the LOGOS (sic) and the *incarnate sojourn* of the Son of God. “In the beginning *was* (a verb of continual timeless existence) the word.” Yet, “the Word *became* (a verb denoting the commencement of His human existence in time) flesh.” In similar fashion, Christ Himself said, “Behold Abraham was born (definite origin), I *am* (always existing)” (John 8:58). Thus, the LOGOS had a pre- human timeless existence.²¹

Jackson, however, maintains the Greek idea of *logos* as the bridge between God’s mind and human minds.²²

John 1:1 has long held a mysterious effect on students of the Bible. From Arianism to now, the pre-existence of the Christ has been debated. It would be ever helpful to remember that a word and its idea *are* co-etaneous. So are God and The Word!

A Study Of Philippians 2:5-11

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him; and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under

the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The exaltation of the one who had been in the “form of God,” or pre-existent, came through His humiliation in coming to earth in fashion as a man. There are six things that were done by the Word in order to empty Himself and to enter the world. Having to do these things proves His pre-existence:

1. The Word did not hold onto equality with God (2:6). He existed (HOOPARON, BEING) in the form (MORPHEE) of God and therefore had all Divine attributes. He appeared to those in heaven who knew Him before He came, as God. He was holy and undefiled. In order to become the blood sacrifice for sins, He did not hold onto *equality* with God. This proves that John 1:1 is indicating a co-etaneous relationship prior to the Word’s leaving heaven (*to EINXI the being equal; isa THEOO, with God*).

2. The Word emptied Himself of reputation (2:7), not of His nature as liberals argue, who add that Christ could have “asserted” Himself and taken the throne of God but decided to remain the “eternal Son.” This is not so, for the Word had equality before His coming to earth. The Word did not need to “assert” Himself. The Word gave up the environment of glory (John 17:4) and took on the limitations of space and time. His humanity became as real as His Deity (John 1:14) in order to teach true service (Matt. 20:28). Docetic gnostics argued for a “phantom” humanity, but Paul here argues for a real “likeness” (*duouoomati*) of man. In 2:6, the Word “being,” became (2:7). (See Hebrews 2:14-17).

3. The Word voluntarily took another form (2:7). This is congruent with the mission of Christ and Jesus' own statements: "Therefore doth my Father love me because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (John 10:17). As the Word, He Could not die. In a prepared body, He could die (Heb. 10:5). Only about a pre-existent one could one so speak. In His human form, the Word was perfect man ("crowned with glory and honor" —Hebrews 2:9b) so to be the one who could taste death for every man and satisfy God's demand for the only sacrifice that could atone for perfect man's (Adam's) sin in the garden and thus satisfy God's justice (Heb. 2:9; Rom. 5:12ff.).

4. The Word was in the likeness of man (2:7). Why is Paul careful to say "likeness" (as in Rom. 8:3)? Because Christ never sinned as those in the flesh do (Heb. 4:15). Even though man can keep God's law (John 14:15), man still is a sinner until God justifies him in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ needed no such justification (Heb. 4:15). This could *not* be said of Him if He had been created by God. He would, as a created being, have been less than God and in need of justification.

5. The Word, as man, fulfilled His mission (2:8). Since He had to "be found" as a man, He was something else prior to this. Paul contrasts Christ here between what He is/was in Himself and how He appeared in the eyes of men. The Word had to *become* obedient unto death because He was not subject to death, not being a sinner (Heb. 5:8-9; 4:15). The Word descended from God's throne to a criminal's stake!

6. The Word died (2:8), but was exalted (2:9-11)

in direct contrast to the humiliation of His incarnation. He was lifted *above* the state of glory He had *before* He came (pre-existed). He came *back* to heaven as Perfect God— Perfect Man. The Jews never pronounced YHWH (the tetragrammaton for YAWEH) but said ADONAI (Lord) instead. But note 1 Timothy 6:15. The Christ has made YHWH fitting to pronounce! The Christ has reconciled man to God and all because the pre-existent Word loved man and deigned to come to earth to reconcile man to YHWH.

“In The Beginning”

Of importance to this study of the pre-existence of the Christ is the statement that He **was** “in the beginning” (John 1:1). If the verb *een* (was) is correctly translated, then the clause would read, “Before there ever was a beginning, the Word had been.”²³ But, what did the apostle John mean when he used the prepositional expression, “in the beginning?”

One, no doubt, immediately thinks of Genesis 1:1- “In the beginning God created the heaven(s) and the earth.” The result of the cause is stated by Moses in Genesis 1:1 and all logicians know that a cause must be sufficient for the result. The Word also fits into Genesis 1:1 for the Second Person of the Godhead also created (Col. 1:16-17). He had to exist prior to creation.

The word, “beginning” is *arches* and in the Greek lexicon *Mega Lexicon Tees Hellinikis Gloosees, Deemeeteakou* vol. II, 1009-10; there is a list of eighteen meanings for this one Greek word.²⁴ The term, *archee*, can be use absolutely or relatively.²⁵ When used absolutely, *archee* refers to the origin of a thing, and the meaning is infinite as in John 1:1. John means “before

there was a beginning the Word existed!" The term, *archee* is used absolutely also in Matthew 19:4; 24:21; John 8:44; 1 John 1:1; 2:13; 3:8 et al. When *archee* is used in the relative sense it means "the beginning of the thing spoken of" (cf. John 6:64).²⁶

Another important distinction about *archee* (and nearly **all** Greek lexicographers state it) is that the term can be either passive or active. Which one is a contextual determination. When *archee* is passive it means that a thing is the result of another cause, but when active it means that the thing is the cause.²⁷ At Revelation 3:14 one reads that Christ is "the beginning of the creation of God." Christ is the one who began creation according to John 1:1-3; therefore Revelation 3:14 uses *archee* in the active sense. The Word caused creation. Therefore, the expression, "in the beginning" fixes the time when the Word began to create since He **was** (had been already). John did not say the Word was **at** or **from** the beginning, but that He existed **in** the beginning.

Summary

The Word which became flesh is co-etaneous with the Godhead (Father and Holy Spirit—John 1:1). He is not "a God," as some teach. The Bible is replete with statements about His pre-existence and eternity (cf. John 8:58—He claims "I AM"), even in the Old Testament prophets. The Holy Spirit's choice of the term, *logos*, to describe His pre-existent state is significant, and the announcement of His virgin birth further confirms His pre-fleshly nature. His very mission (Phil. 2:5-11) forever implies His eternal pre-existence, and His prayer seals the teaching of this grand thought: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

Endnotes

1 _____, **Let God Be True** (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., 1952), pp. 33-34.

2 Ibid.

3 It is recognized that the term “Pre-existence” does not occur in the New Testament. The term seems to appear for the first time in Justin Martyr’s dialogue with Trypho 48 according to Craddock. (**The Pre-existence of Christ in the New Testament**, [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1968], footnote, 15.)

4 Ibid., p. 14.

5 Roy H. Lanier, Sr., **The Timeless Trinity for the Ceaseless Centuries** (Denver, CO: Lanier Publications, 1974), p. 160.

6 Ibid., 276.

7 Barton W. Stone, “To James Blythe, D.D.,” **Christian Messenger** 3 (September 1829): 269-77. See also “A Short Method with Unitarians,” **Christian Messenger** 4 (July 1830): pp. 181-85.

8 Stone, “To James Blythe, D.D.,” p. 275.

9 Ibid., p. 276.

10 Alexander Campbell, “To Timothy,” **The Christian Baptist** 4 (March 1, 1827): pp. 333-34.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 James Hastings, **The Speaker’s Bible**, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1971), p. 11.

19 Ibid., p. 12.

20 See Merrill C. Tenney, **The Gospel of Belief** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948) for a discussion of this matter, especially pages 62-65.

21 Wayne Jackson, “The Pre-Existence and Birth of Jesus,” **The Spiritual Sword** 1 (April 1970):1.

22 Ibid., p. 2.

23 Spiros Zodihates, **Was Christ God?** (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1970), p. 47.

24 Ibid., p. 48.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p. 49.

27 Ibid.

CHAPTER 29

THE INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST

HARRELL DAVIDSON

WE *CONSIDER IT TO* be a high honor to participate in this great lectureship once again. We have enjoyed being in your presence a number of times and had the great honor of being on the very first Power lecture, substituting for a brother who was ill. That was the first time that we had an introduction to the Southaven congregation. Brother Kevin Beard was your song leader, and Kevin has gone on to be one of the great young preachers in our great brotherhood.

We appreciate the invitation extended to us by brother Clarke and the elders to write on this subject. Space restrictions will not allow me to develop in detail all that should be said about the Virgin Birth of Christ. We will, however, get important facts set before us that will fortify our faith in the virgin birth.

The Problems

The problems that exist are not what the Bible has to say about the virgin birth. The first problem is accepting the inspiration of the Scriptures. The second problem that exists is a misunderstanding of what Isaiah is saying in chapters 6 and 7. The third problem is a failure on man's part to understand Matthew 1 and other related passages

on the virgin birth as it is reported in the New Testament. We shall approach these one at a time.

Problem One Explained

The inspiration of the Scripture is clearly affirmed and proven in the Bible. In 2 Timothy 3:16 the Bible says: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” In my judgement the King James Version is superior to all other translations in this particular passage. The Greek passage involved is *pasa graphee theopneustos kai ophelimos*, literally, and in the order in which these occur, we have the following; “All writing God-breathed and profitable.” It is rather obvious that the arrangement is justified the way we have it in the KJV due to our idiom and to indicate the fullness and completeness of what is expressly stated. The subject and predicate must be rearranged and a copula (connecting link between the two) be inserted. Brother Woods says:

To this end, the following questions must be settled: (1) Where should the copula (the verb is) be inserted; (2) What is the meaning of the adjective *pasa*? (3) Is the particle *kai* adjunctive or simply connective?¹

Brother Woods now answers the three questions. He shows that the copula should “be inserted before the phrase, “given by inspiration of God,” thus making the passage say in effect, “The scripture is inspired of God.”

What is the meaning of the adjective *pasa*? The KJV translators translated it “all,” and the American Standard scholars translated it “every.” The word *graphe* means inspired writings. The effect that this has on the passage is simply that it teaches that all inspired writings are from

God or God breathed. The great A. T. Robertson agrees with this same reasoning. He opines that *pasa* means “all.”

The third question raised is “the participle *kai* adjunctive or simply connective?” The American Standard translators thought it was the former and so rendered it also in the phrase, “is also profitable,” whereas the King James’ translators thought it is a simple connective, translating it, “*and* is profitable.”² It is very obvious to the casual student that all Scripture is inspired of God. If all Scriptures are given by His breath, then They are and that should settle the matter. However, some liberals, and almost all modernists disagree on these. The Word of God is verbally inspired, by this we mean word for word. Please notice 2 Peter 1:21; “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Peter affirms by inspiration that holy men of God spake. What did they speak? “The spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). The Word of God was in their tongue:

Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth (Jer. 1:6-9).

It is rather obvious that Jeremiah proclaims that he was but a child, and he did not know what to say. God told him that He would put His Words in his mouth. Jesus

promised the Father in His prayer for the apostles.

For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me (John 17:8).

The conclusion that is drawn from the aforementioned arguments is that the Bible is verbally (word for word) inspired by God. There are seven hundred seventy three thousand seven hundred forty six words in the Bible. They all belong there and not one of them should be removed. Moses said: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:32). John, banished on Patmos said:

And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

Man is forbidden to add to or take away from God's inspired Book.

If people had the respect that they claim to have for the Bible they would not doubt the record of the virgin birth of our Lord. No Bible loving person has ever said that this is just a narrative of some kind, or that it really doesn't mean what it says. However, as senseless as it may seem, modernists and liberals have argued that this was only a prediction to a local situation and was fulfilled in the days of Isaiah or Ahaz.

Isaiah 7:14 says, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a

son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” It is now my cumbersome job to introduce the book of Isaiah so that we may understand the background of the virgin birth.

The Second Problem Explained

The book of Isaiah goes back to the reign of Uzziah. Isaiah probably prophesied for about sixty to sixty-five years. He was addressing Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah who were kings of Judah. The Assyrian kingdom is still the strongest kingdom. Babylon had not as yet come into power. It is well to remember that Assyria made some invasions into Judah as can be seen in 2 Kings. A review of such can be found in chapters 15 through 20. Reading these will bring you down chronologically to Isaiah 1:1.

The first 35 chapters contain one complete section. It covers the time of all the kings except Hezekiah. Only a part of his reign is touched upon in these chapters. During this time there is the warning of judgement. It might be discussed under the heading of the “Price of Sin.” The nations that surround Judah will be discarded much like an old shoe. Isaiah 36-39 are connecting links between what we have in chapters 1-35 and 40-66. Put together, we have the fact that through prayer and penitence they were able to win a victory. This is where Hezekiah comes to Elijah to find out if there is any word from God. He was wanting to know what to do because Sennacherib was literally knocking at the door of Jerusalem. Hezekiah wanted to know what the prophet had to say. By this he demonstrated that he knew the importance of the prophets. He submitted to the words of the prophet and obtained a victory over Sennacherib. This is the only reason that this victory took place.

Some critics of the book of Isaiah claim that it is a disjointed book or even two books. It is one book though

it deals with two different situations on two different occasions. One is Assyria, and the other is Babylon and the capture of Judah. Chapters 36-39 act as a bridge tying these two things together. Chapters 1-35 show the price of sin, and failing to hear the prophets. Chapters 40-66 give the promise of the hope of promised peace. The first part of Isaiah is his dealing with the nations around Judah. Isaiah was God's authority and the power of God's Word to rule over other nations. Israel was to be a light to the other nations. They failed in their mission. Isaiah becomes God's spokesman for Judah and the nations around them. Chapters 40-66 are the kingdom of peace. In chapters 40-48, we have the purpose of peace. In chapters 49-57, we have the Prince of peace-Christ. In chapters 58-66, we have the program of peace. This last entire section has to do with peace. The oft repeated phrase in Isaiah is "there is no peace for the wicked." How true this is even today. This has been true from Eden.

However, when Hezekiah turned to God through the prophet, there was peace in Judah. Isaiah would talk about a kingdom to come that would bring peace and righteousness. Chapters 1-5 are the reign of Uzziah. In chapter 6, he dies, and Jotham begins his reign. Not much is given here about him. His son, Ahaz begins his reign and he reigns down to chapter 13. So it is in the time of Ahaz that our historical passage is found.

In chapter 7, Jotham dies and Ahaz his son begins his reign over Judah. The kings of Syria and Israel wanted a conspiracy against the king of Judah, but they could not prevail (cf. 7:1). 2 Chronicles 28 gives a detailed account of this action. Ahaz was not a good king as was his father. He and other kings made a covenant to destroy the house of David. The house of David takes us back to 2 Samuel 7 where God made a covenant with David which was an extension of the promise God made to Abraham. The

action taken by these kings should not be viewed as only the overthrow of Judah, but also a destroying of the house of David from which Christ would come. This is the context that we are working with. Syria and Ephraim are allied against Judah. Ahaz shook as the trees. He didn't ask Isaiah what to do, but in verse 4, Isaiah gives him advice just the same.

Isaiah showed that the king of Syria and Israel were nothing more than smoking "firebrands," that is, only smoke and no fire, signaling that they were about through. There is no way that God is going to let the house of David be destroyed. Damascus is not going to take Jerusalem's place. In sixty five years they will be gone. God encourages Ahaz to believe this, and if he didn't, he could not be established. In verses 10 and 11 we note: "Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above." The kingdom of David is not going to be destroyed. Ahaz said in verse 12 that he would not ask neither would he tempt the Lord. He would reject the word of the prophet. This was due to unbelief. He was already worshipping idols. It is important to keep this in mind as we get to verse 14. In verse 13, Isaiah says "house of David", not the house of Ahaz.

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign;
Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and shall call his name Immanuel.

If one sees the Sovereignty and Holiness of God in Chapter 6, then there should be no problem in seeing the significance of the prophecy of the virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14. The two principles of God's Sovereignty and Holiness underscore two things: the faithfulness of God, and the

need of man because of his sinfulness. The prophecy of the coming kingdom in Isaiah chapter 2 is related to these problems as is the virgin birth of chapter 7. If one looks at the context of Isaiah 7:14, the so-called problem vanishes.

Is This A Dual Prophecy?

The reason that some contend for dual prophecy is because of the statement in verse 16: "For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings." That this verse refers to something in the days of Ahaz is evident, but a dual prophecy cannot be the answer to the problem. I have already shown the impossibility of there being a dual prophecy of the virgin birth.

Instead of there being a dual fulfillment of the prophecy, there are two prophecies given by Isaiah. Isaiah 7:14-15 is a prophecy of the virgin birth. Isaiah 7:16 is another prophecy relating solely to the overthrow of Israel and Syria. A study of the context, beginning in verse 1, will enable one to see that there are two prophecies and two fulfillments, not one prophecy with a dual fulfillment. Look back to Isaiah 7:3 where God said:

Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shearjashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field.

Note that this is a command for Isaiah to meet Ahaz. Isaiah is commanded to take "thy son." The son's name was Shearjashub (a remnant shall return), the very thing that happened.

Why did God command Isaiah to take this child? It is not reasonable to think that God commanded such, and that this has no relationship to the events of the chapter.

This is not just an example of a father taking a child with him, but of a father doing it by divine command. According to most exegeses of this chapter, this action by Isaiah is entirely overlooked. Since Isaiah was commanded to take his child with him to meet Ahaz, what was the significance of it? “Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion” (Isa. 8:18).

Notice the word “children” in this verse. “Moreover the Lord said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man’s pen concerning Mahershalalhashbaz” (Isa. 8:1). Thus, both of Isaiah’s children were “signs.” Since the child that Isaiah carried with him to meet Ahaz was a sign, is it a proper exegesis of Isaiah to completely ignore this child? If the child is to be considered in the exegesis of the chapter, where will he fit? There is only one place, and that is verse 16. The child of verse 16 is Isaiah’s child that was a sign, not the son that was born of the virgin of verse 14.

A careful reading of verses 15-16 will establish this fact. Notice carefully verse 10: “Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying...” To whom? Ahaz! Now consider verse 13: “...Hear ye now, O house of David,” Isaiah’s message is to Ahaz and also to the house of David. The sign of verse 14 is to the house of David, that is, the lineage of David through whom the promise of Abraham was channeled. (See Luke chapters 1 and 2.)

The change from Ahaz in verse 10 to the house of David in verse 13 is significant. In spite of the unbelief of Ahaz, God’s promise to Abraham through David would be fulfilled. Verse 14 is God’s assurance that the promised seed of Abraham would be born of a virgin. The word “Immanuel” in verse 14 shows His Deity. There was no way a son could be born and be Deity except by a virgin. Verse 15 sets forth His humanity. “Butter and honey shall

he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.” The last part of verse 15 shows that He would live a sinless life. Look at Hebrews 1:9: “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”

Verse 14 is a prophecy of His virgin birth and Deity. Verse 15 is a prophecy of his humanity and sinless life. Vs. 16 is not the same child of verse 14 but was Isaiah’s child. If not, why under the sun did God command Isaiah to take his son with him when in fact both of his sons were signs in Isaiah 8:18. “This child” (his child) was prophetic action. The prophetic action of verse 16 was directed to Ahaz. Before Isaiah’s child was old enough to know good and evil, Israel and Syria would be forsaken of their kings.

As proof that this is correct, compare the language of verse 16 with Chapter 8:4. Note the parallel: “For before the child shall know...” (7:16) “For before the child shall have knowledge to cry...” (8:4). Is it difficult to see the similarity of the language and the principles in these verses? Now let me ask, who is the child in 8:4? Surely, no one would deny that the child of 8:4 is Isaiah’s. Then it should be plain that the child of 7:16 is also Isaiah’s, and it was no virgin birth. How could God have done more to avoid the confusion? God told him to take the child. Surely no one would suggest that he was born of a virgin, but it was a child that he had with him, perhaps in his arms, when he made the prophecy of verse 16. It was this child that was already born that was the sign of verse 16. Here we have two prophecies and two fulfillments, not one prophecy and a dual fulfillment.

Isaiah 7:14 should read “virgin,” not “young woman.” All attempts to justify the RSV and other translations of Isaiah 7:14 to make them read “young woman” are

misdirected efforts. It has long been my conviction that the Bible is its own best interpreter. Letting Isaiah, along with Matthew, interpret 7:14-16 solves all the difficulties without compromising the fundamental truth of the virgin birth of Christ. This analysis of Chapter 7 fits the text, the context, and the key thought of the entire book. It holds the truth of Isaiah 7 and defends inspiration, prophecy, and the virgin birth. This is not a strained interpretation. It is just a simple, plain explanation of a passage that has been made difficult by ignoring what the passage says.

A Brief Look At Matthew's Account Problem Three Explained

There had been a four hundred year period that the pen of inspiration had been laid aside when the events in Matthew took place. During that four hundred year period the Pharisees and the Sadducees had their beginning. Matthew is to the New Testament what Genesis is to the Old Testament. Genesis is the beginning of all that we would study in the Old Testament as Matthew was the same to the rest of the New Testament. Matthew makes the transition from the Old Testament to Acts 2 and the Day of Pentecost. Without Matthew, and the other biographers, we would never understand Acts 2. The purpose of Matthew is to show to the Jews that Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament and to demonstrate their misconception of the nature of the kingdom.

The key note of the book of Matthew is found in the first verse: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." This shows how important it is to study the Old Testament. David and Abraham are used as a summary of the Old Testament where the promise to Abraham was made (cf Gen. 12). In

2 Samuel 17 a promise was made to David about a kingdom, and his seed would sit on that throne. The promise to Abraham was a promise of redemption. So the promise of redemption would be in relationship to the everlasting kingdom.

Matthew was written to the Jews because they had misunderstood the purpose of the Old Testament and the nature of the promise of God. They still failed to understand when Christ came into the world. The Jews still do not believe that Christ is sitting on David's throne, though Matthew 1 refutes this idea entirely. The Old Testament pointed to Christ. Christ pointed to Pentecost. Matthew shows the spiritual nature of the kingdom and presents the King who would be a spiritual king over a spiritual kingdom. The Jews did not understand this at all. They could only comprehend a physical kingdom. They could not see that the Redeemer of the world would be the King.

The word "kingdom" is used approximately fifty four times in Matthew. What better way was there to show the nature of the spiritual kingdom? Matthew's terminology is different from Mark's and Luke's record. Matthew talks about the Kingdom of Heaven. Mark and Luke talk about the Kingdom of God.

Matthew's terminology, thus, shows the kingdom to have Divine origin in God as it came from heaven. What better word could be used than heaven to show the spiritual nature of the kingdom? It was to be a universal kingdom. It would not be a national kingdom. It was not a racial kingdom nor would it be fleshly. The King that Matthew announces will be set forth as a King who is from God and a King from God to man for God. The Jews to this day go down to the weeping wall and pray for the Messiah to come. Matthew takes care of that in that he reports the Messiah's birth into this world. The Jewish

Sanhedrin said that this was fulfilled when Christ was born in Bethlehem as foretold. Matthew 2:6 reports a Governor and a Ruler. Micah said He would rule. Here He is and that settles the matter. The Sanhedrin have spoken and that should have closed the Jewish book on the matter, but it did not and has not to this very day.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 1:18). There are at least two outstanding things in this verse: (1) His humanity. (2) His divinity. This is the confirmation of Deity and humanity. The fact that you can have Deity and humanity together is the result of the failure on the part of humanity to take care of the problem of sin.

This underscores why Deity had to come in the flesh. Man, on his own, apart from what Deity would provide could not save himself. Man could not find the solution to sin. God had to take matters in His own hands and to come as flesh and blood so that man could understand. God entered into the struggle personally by coming into the world in the person of Christ to live among men. So, in effect we have the Divine and human in fellowship. We learn in Genesis that God and man enjoyed fellowship together. Genesis 3 ended that fellowship, and God announces His Son in Gen. 3:15, which is a reference to His virgin birth. I realize that the word virgin is not in Genesis 3:15, but Christ coming through the seed of woman would be accomplished through the virgin birth.

The Old Testament was limited to man’s salvation. There was no complete forgiveness. Christ became man and took care of the problem. Deity and man are combined in fellowship. Now watch it! Unless Christ could live a sinless life there could be no way for Deity and humanity to live together on this earth.

Matthew 1:19 shows Joseph to be a just man. God did not select someone in the lineage of David whose life was ungodly to be the legal father of Christ. Mary, the virgin, was a young woman, but more than that she was a virgin. Young woman just will not translate the word *almah*. Furthermore, all of us came into the world by a young woman. That being the case, what would be different then about Christ's birth? The RSV missed it in Isa. 7:14, and it appears they knew it for the translators understood here in Matthew's account that Mary was a virgin—not just a young woman as they depicted earlier.

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Every Bible believing person in the world knows that this is the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. This is interesting for two or three different reasons. Sometimes people say that we cannot understand the Bible alike. Sometimes they say you believe it the way you want, and I will do the same.

His name will be Emmanuel. How is that to be interpreted? Here is the way to interpret the Bible. Let it speak! Suppose I say that Jesus was not divine? Is it all right for me to interpret the Bible this way? No! This is precisely how the modernists interpret this occasion. However, the Bible does not allow this. I do not have the right to put any interpretation on what the Bible teaches. Emmanuel means, according to the Scripture, “God with us.” What does this mean? God is saying that I am now in this struggle with you. I will provide what you can not provide for yourselves. When Jesus came through the virgin birth, He came to establish a “beach head” of righteousness in this world for sinful man.

He came from God to man for God to reveal God unto man. Christ in Matthew is a revelation from God. Matthew will reveal to mankind the rule of God. God

must rule in our lives. He will show the compassion of God. He will show the Holiness of God through the sinlessness of Christ. His sinlessness is a revelation of the holiness of God throughout the book of Matthew. Matthew will finally reveal the authority of God in Matthew 28. Christ then is pictured what God is like in this great book. Christ is the interpretation of how man is to please God. Matthew tells what God wants me to be like. Book after book in the Old Testament shows God being rejected as King. God is now going to show that He is King over all. Man must submit himself to God.

The King's credentials are given in the first part of Matthew chapter one. Truly of great heritage, and the virgin birth is the beginning of salvation being made possible for man who fell in Eden. The virgin birth reaffirms our faith and confidence in God. He keeps His eternal Word. Christ was born of a virgin. This is only one of about 300 prophecies that were made in the Old Testament that were fulfilled in the New Testament. We thank God for all of them, and His great love for us in giving His only begotten Son as a sin offering for us. We do not deserve it.

Endnotes

- 1 Guy N. Woods, **Questions and Answers**, Open Forum, p.132.
- 2 Woods, **Questions and Answer**, Open Forum, p. 133.

CHAPTER 30

THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST

DAVID JONES

WE ARE THANKFUL FOR another invitation to speak on the Annual Power Lectures. We are grateful for the fine elders who oversee this good and godly congregation in such a loving way. Thanks also go forth to the fine director of this lectureship, B.J. Clarke. His devoted and dedicated work is greatly needed and greatly appreciated.

The theme for this year's lectures is one which should be of great benefit for many years to come, Lord willing and time continues. The subject of the Godhead has caused many questions in the minds of faithful brethren, as well as, in the minds of the enemies of Christianity. The compilation of these manuscripts will serve as a feast for the faithful as they study the Word of God. We are to concentrate our efforts on **The Deity of Christ** in this study.

Introduction

The apostle Paul recorded the fact the church was the eternal of purpose of God:

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints,
is this grace given, that I should preach among
the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

And to make all men see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (Eph. 3:8-11).

The purpose for all of God's providential work through the law and the prophets was to point men to the Christ and to the establishing of His church. Therefore, the church shows the manifold wisdom of almighty God to any who desire to see, including the angels (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Logically it follows if the church was the eternal purpose of God, the plan of salvation would also be according to the wisdom of God. The Lord admitted such to the apostle Paul (then known as Saul of Tarsus) on the road to Damascus:

And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do (Acts 22:10).

The word "appointed" comes from a Greek word which means "to arrange in an orderly manner, to arrange or set." Thus, the plan of salvation, or terms of entrance, was arranged or set by God who also ordained the establishment of the church. One of the components of that plan is to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The Lord acknowledged as much when He said to the Jews: "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). The apostle Paul later wrote the letter to the

Romans and said:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

One must believe with all of his heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. God demands we believe the Deity of Christ in order for us to be saved.

In the scheme of redemption, God sent forth His Son to shed His blood for the sins of the world. God created man and placed him in the garden, commanding him not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). God promised man death would occur if he violated this command. Adam and Eve did violate the command of God (Gen. 3:1-6) and they were expelled from the garden, ushering in death and decay for mankind. Because of His mercy and love for His creation, God set forth a plan in action to atone for the sins of man. God promised Satan: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

From then until the cross God was working out His plan according to His purpose. Many prophecies were made during this time concerning the coming Christ and His kingdom. The Jews were to believe and to look forward to the day when the Messiah would come and establish that kingdom. God had given them His oracles so they would be prepared and would be ready to receive the Messiah who would come in the name of the Lord. However, when Jesus came and revealed Himself, the Jews rejected Him because they were looking for a king who fit their mold. Their rejection turned to anger and

envy and ultimately they nailed the Lamb of God to the cross. God's plan had now been accomplished. He had sent His only begotten Son to die for mankind. Therefore, Jesus Christ, His crucifixion and resurrection, is the center of Christianity. His sacrifice was the ultimate end of the Old Law and through the shedding of His blood the New Testament was dedicated. Thus God requires all who will be saved to believe with all their heart that Jesus Christ was indeed Deity in the flesh. He requires that all who will be heirs of the salvation provided for by the Lamb of God to have faith in His Deity. When we say He was Deity, we are saying He possessed the nature and attributes which the Godhead possessed.

As one might expect this command has been challenged since the first century and continues to be challenged even today. God did not command us to believe this blindly or without any proof or evidence. The evidences are abundant and clear that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh.

Jesus and His disciples came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi and against the backdrop of huge clefts of rock we read the following verses:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 16:13-17).

Peter answered confidently and with much conviction. The Father had revealed the Son through various ways and all should have been able to see this. Why could Peter have so much confidence that Jesus was the Christ?

His Deity Was Shown By Inspiration

The inspired record plainly states Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. John records:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not (John 1:1-5).

According to the above verses, there is a difference between the Word and God. The Word was responsible for the creation of the world and without Him nothing was made that was made. At that time the Word was equal to God, thus He was divine in nature and attributes. Other references which clearly point out this are:

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they *bethrones*, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: (Col. 1:16).

Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; (Heb. 1:2).

And unto the angel of the church of the

Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; (Rev. 3:14).

Paul affirms in the book of Colossians that Christ was the agent of creation. The Hebrews writer clearly shows that all things were made by Him. John claims Christ was the beginning of creation, that is, the one who began the creation. Later, however, the Word became flesh: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The Word became Jesus Christ, the Son of God, coming to earth to satisfy the righteous demands of heaven. A perfect man sinned in the garden and it would take a perfect man to die on the cross as a sacrifice for all of mankind. There was a need for a mediator, one who could relate to both sides of the problem. The problem simply stated was — man was worthy of death because of sin, but God, being rich in mercy, sent His Son to die in man’s place so man could have a right to the tree of life in heaven. John plainly tells us through inspiration that the Word became flesh, becoming the sin offering for man. The Word declared the Father to men: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). If Jesus declared the Father to men He had to be Deity to accomplish this mission.

At the end of the gospel account written by John we read these words:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through

his name” (John 20:30-31).

The written record was given and preserved that we might believe Jesus was Deity. Thus, Christ was God in that He had divine attributes, but at the same time, He was man so that He could be tempted as man and yet overcome as a man in order to set an example for us and to help us when we are tempted. The Hebrews writer informs us of His humanity in the following verses:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Heb 2:9).

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb 2:14-15).

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:15-16).

The Word became flesh that He might die as a sacrifice for man (as God alone He could not die) and that He might know our feelings and infirmities, giving us hope comfort.

The Messianic prophet Isaiah called the Son “Mighty God” in Isaiah 9:6:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful,
Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting
Father, The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

In the year King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw the Lord on His throne and exclaimed:

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because
I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the
midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes
have seen the King, the LORD of hosts (Isa. 6:5).

Later John recorded words which would refer to this scene and applied them to Christ:

While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them. But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him (John 12:36-41).

Isaiah referred to Jesus as God and Lord. Later the apostle John would say these things were written concerning Christ. Inspiration says beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was Deity.

In Isaiah 8:12-14, Israel is to sanctify the “Lord of Hosts”:

Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Isa. 8:12-14).

The apostle Peter makes reference to this and makes application to Jesus:

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: (1 Pet. 3:14-15).

We see once again reference made to the Deity of Christ. Inspiration over and over confirms the fact Jesus Christ was God in the flesh.

Isaiah prophesies of one who will make ready the way of God: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isa. 40:3). The opening verses of the gospel account written by Mark makes

application of this prophesy to Jesus Christ:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight (Mark 1:1-3).

Once again inspiration builds for us a sure foundation that Jesus Christ was Deity.

The psalms have much to say about the Deity of Christ when one notices them with their fulfillments in the New Testament. For example, Psalm 110:4 reads: "The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." The Hebrews writer quotes this psalm in the context of speaking of Christ. In Hebrews we read:

For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest, (Heb. 7:14-15).

In this context we read the quote of Psalm 110:4 in Hebrews 7:17. Later the writer will say: "**By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament**" (Heb. 7:22). Thus again we are convinced by inspiration that Jesus was Deity. There were hundreds of prophesies made concerning the coming Christ which were fulfilled perfectly in Christ. This fact alone testifies to the Deity of Christ. To make it even more abundantly clear, there were twenty-four prophesies fulfilled in the last twenty-four hours

before His death on the cross.

His Deity Was Shown By His Proclamation

The Lord was attacked on many occasions by His enemies in attempts to trick or trip Him, but to no avail. We read in Matthew chapter twenty-two of several attacks which were made, one behind the other, by the religious leaders and their accomplices.

After their failure to achieve their goal, Jesus asked them a question: **“Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, *The son of David*”** (Matt. 22:42). They were quick to make reference to prophecy from the Old Testament which said the Christ was to come through the lineage of David and thus be the “son of David.” Upon their answer, Jesus asked them some more questions:

He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? (Matt. 22:43-45).

Jesus quotes psalm 110:1 and applies it to Himself. In essence He asked them, “How can the Christ be both the Lord of David and the son of David?” This reference shows both His humanity (son of David) and His Deity (Lord of David). By His own proclamation, Jesus claimed to be Deity and proved it with Scripture. Jesus was born of a woman, yet also claimed to be the Lord of David. The Jews could not accept this claim seeing how Jesus was not their type of king or Messiah. They were looking for the military, physical type of king and Jesus came teaching that His kingdom would be of a spiritual nature and His subjects would be humble servants.

Jesus said of Himself: “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Isaiah had spoken of a time when the glory of the Lord would be the everlasting light:

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee (Isa 60:1)...Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended (Isa 60:20).

Obviously the light Jesus claims to be is the light which was foretold by the Messianic prophet.

Jesus used the expression “I am” to refer to Himself on more than one occasion:

I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24)...Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things (John 8:28).....Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am (John 8:58).

In that great debate we read in John chapter eight, Jesus is arguing the point of His Deity and their rejection of such with the Jews. He associates them with their father the Devil because they do the works of their father. He rejected God and His word because there was no truth in him and Jesus likens the Jews of His day to him. They likewise rejected God and His word because they refused

to accept the fact Jesus was the Messiah. In His rebuking of them, Jesus makes reference back to the time God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, answering Moses' question as to who it was that was sending him to lead His people from bondage:

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations (Exod. 3:14-15).

There can be no mistake made as to the fact that I AM is God. Jesus applies this title to Himself, showing His Deity. The Jews placed all their trust in their physical lineage to Abraham, thinking themselves to be saved simply because their physical blood line linked them to him. Jesus claimed to be alive even before Abraham, making Him Lord over Abraham.

Jesus also claimed He and the Father were one: "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). This straight forward claim shows His Deity. He and His Father were one because they possessed the same divine attributes. Jesus was sent from His Father to do the works of His Father: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). Several times Jesus claimed to have been sent from His Father above: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:38-40)...But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me (John 7:29).

The fact that He came from His Father proves His Deity:

But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel (John 5:17-20).

During this exchange with the Jews, the Jews understood clearly Jesus claimed to be Deity. They sought to kill Him because He made Himself equal with God. This is another way of saying He was divine. He claimed that His Father was God. This is exactly what the prophet Isaiah said would happen: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14).

We can know this refers to Christ because the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to write:

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (Matt. 1:21-23).

Their incorrect view of the promised kingdom and subsequently, the Messiah who would establish that kingdom, hardened their hearts to the fact of His Deity.

Jesus claimed to know the Father, acknowledging His Deity:

As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father (John 10:15-18).

Notice Jesus received the commandment of His Father, showing His Deity. The Jews considered it blasphemous for Him to claim to be the Son of God. Of course, it would have been if He had not been Deity.

His Deity Was Shown By Miraculous Confirmation

Not only was the Deity of Christ shown by inspiration of the Scriptures and the proclamation by Jesus Himself, but by confirmation through His miracles, proving He was sent from above, hence His Deity. Humans even admitted to this fact. When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night he said: "The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2).

The Jews were familiar with God's power as shown through His miracles, being revealed through the pages of the Old Testament. Therefore, when Jesus came working miracles and claiming to be the Messiah, the honest-hearted Israelite should have been able to see the Deity of Christ. In his sermon in Acts two, Peter acknowledged God was with Jesus:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: (Acts 2:22).

Also when Peter preached to the Gentiles, he emphasized the same truth:

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him (Acts 10:38).

Thus, the miraculous confirmation proved His Deity.

When Jesus was baptized of John in the Jordan River, God acknowledged from heaven the Deity of Christ:

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:16-17).

Also on the mount of transfiguration, God audibly acknowledged Christ's Deity:

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him (Matt. 17:5).

Peter made reference to this event in his own writings: "And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Pet 1:18). First, we see God's endorsement of Christ which was shown in a miraculous way.

Second, the miracles themselves show His Deity. His miracles were intended to prove His Deity. John records:

If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him (John 10:37-38).

His miracles were genuine, they were done in the presence of many, and they were instantaneous and complete. They caused the honest to believe in God and they caused the dishonest to seek revenge. His miracles were the proof of His message. In Mark chapter two we read of one such occasion. Jesus was located in Capernaum

in a house preaching the word. There were so many assembled no one else could enter. As was the norm, the sick were brought to Him for healing. Because the people were so many and the house could not be entered, the four men broke away some of the tiles in the roof and lowered the man who had the palsy down to Jesus. Wanting to show His Deity, Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven. Immediately His enemies reasoned in their hearts that He was blaspheming. Jesus responded by asking:

Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house (Mark 2:9-11).

It was one thing to say or speak as the Son of God; it was another thing altogether to prove that with a miracle. Jesus had said this man's sins were forgiven which was easy to do. But, He proved it by confirming His word with a miracle. Mark records:

And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion (Mark 2:12).

Jesus did not tell this man in a week or two he would begin to receive strength. Immediately this man arose and walked. The miracle confirmed His word and proved His Deity.

The crowning miracle was performed at His resurrection. Paul records: "And declared to be the Son of

God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:" (Rom. 1:4). When God raised Christ from the dead, He for ever acknowledged the Deity of Christ. In fact, He gave assurance of several things. Paul claimed we know there will be a judgment:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

The resurrection of Christ from the dead confirms for us there will be a day in which all will be judged by the Christ. Christ had likewise foretold of this: "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:" (John 5:22). The miracle of resurrection confirmed this word and His Deity. His resurrection also assures us of our resurrection:

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming (1 Cor 15:20-23).

Conclusion

As we stated in the outset, when one acknowledges faith that Christ is the Son of God in order to be saved, he admits he believes with all of his heart everything in the

Bible is true. Christ is pictured and portrayed to us from Genesis to Revelation. His Deity is affirmed and confirmed in various ways so that no one is excused. Paul affirmed such to the Romans:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (Rom. 1:20).

As one looks at the creation, he sees evidence of the Godhead. Seeing the Godhead's work causes one to confess the fact Jesus Christ is Deity. Without such belief one cannot be saved (John 8:24). The pillar and ground of our faith is the Deity of Christ:

...the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:15-16).

We should be ever grateful to God for the sending of His Son to die in our places. We should be equally thankful for the Son who took upon Him the form of a servant and died for our sins:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

Jesus did not count His equality with the Father something to be held on to, but subjected Himself to the Father to die in our places. May we be as ready to humble ourselves to Him and conform to His image that we might be saved by grace through faith.

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CHAPTER 31

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

JIM DEARMAN

“**T**HEREFORE CONSIDER THE GOODNESS and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Rom. 11:22). This passage calls upon us to consider both the goodness and severity of God. Within the scope of this lesson, we will examine the first part of the admonition, as we consider the goodness of God.

The psalmist declared: “...the goodness of God endures continually” (Psm. 52:1). Consideration of God’s continual goodness produces the proper response in man—repentance. “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). It is clear that the riches of God’s goodness should produce gratitude which leads man to lovingly obey God’s Will. There has never been a time when God’s goodness has not been manifested to man. However, of all peoples of the past, the Israelites should have considered and cherished the goodness of God toward them.

The Israelites were a people who enjoyed a special relationship with God and who were the recipients of God’s special blessings. On one occasion God said to them:

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God;
the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people

for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face (Deut. 7:6-10).

For the most part, the Jews did not consider and react favorably to the goodness of God. In Isaiah 5, the prophet revealed a parable concerning God's people and their failure to consider His goodness:

Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell

you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briers and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help (Isa. 5:1-7).

The vineyard in this parable represents God's people of old. The verses begin with a depiction of the tender care which God, the owner, had given to His vineyard. The Lord had been so good to His people, and He anticipated a loving, grateful response to His goodness. He expected the "good grapes" to grow out of the gratitude of His people for His goodness toward them. However, he received the "wild grapes" of wrath and rebellion.

The key question in this parable is found in verse 4: "...What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?" The question is obviously a rhetorical one in which God asserts that He had done all that was necessary to produce a grateful and loving response. That goodness is seen throughout Israel's history. However, a brief review of the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, reveals how much God had done for Israel in manifesting His goodness toward them.

The Goodness Of God In Genesis

In Genesis chapter one, the word "good" appears six times. In the final verse of the chapter, the writer summarizes God's wonderful creation as "very good." Man's introduction to God's Word is the account of the creation of the universe, and in His creation we first see

the goodness of God. The psalmist wrote: “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psm. 19:1). However, one also may affirm that, as an integral part of His glory, the heavens declare the “goodness” of God. The apostle Paul refers to God’s goodness in creation in Acts 14:17, where he writes, “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” The physical blessings from God create gratitude in the considerate heart who recognizes the source of these blessings. Again, in the Roman letter, Paul reminds us of the knowledge which may be gained about God from creation:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:18-20).

The beauty which surrounds us in every season should tell us something about the goodness of God, who gave us, not only the beauty, but the ability to appreciate it. But, while we may learn something about the goodness of God through His physical creation, we come to a full appreciation of it in the spiritual creation which culminated at Calvary.

When man succumbed to sin, God set in motion a plan for redeeming him. The first reference to the cross and to the Christ who would die there is in Genesis 3:15.

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” This is a reference to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. In the crucifixion, Satan would render a minor blow to the Savior. However, by coming forth from the grave, Jesus would gain the ultimate victory over the Devil.

The unfolding of God’s redemptive plan throughout the Old Testament demonstrates the truthfulness of the psalmist’s statement: “The goodness of God endures continually.” God’s enduring goodness toward man begins in Genesis, and it should have produced endless gratitude in those who considered it. However, as the prophet Isaiah stated, God’s people did not always consider His goodness. “The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider” (Isa. 1:3).

God’s Goodness In Exodus

When we review God’s relationship with Israel in the book of Exodus, we find repeated examples of failure to consider the goodness of God. The plagues against Egypt not only demonstrated God’s power over the false gods of the Egyptians, but they depicted the goodness of God toward Israel. The final plague involved the institution of the Passover. This was to be a memorial to the Jews throughout their generations, reminding them of the goodness of God in sparing their firstborn and in delivering them from Egyptian bondage. In Exodus 12, the Lord gave specific instructions to the Israelites, telling them to put the lamb’s blood on the lintel and the door posts, and commanding them to remain in their houses until the morning.

For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the

lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you. And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, what do you mean by this service? that you shall say, it is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households. So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. (Exod. 12:23-28).

God intended for every generation of Israelites, as long as the Old Covenant was in effect, to observe the Passover. However, it was never to be observed as an empty ritual, but as a meaningful expression of love and gratitude to God for His goodness in delivering His people from Egyptian bondage. Notice what they were to say to their children when they inquired about the meaning of this service. The parents were to convey to their little ones the goodness of God in His deliverance. They were to instill gratitude and love in the hearts of their children, who, in turn, would do the same with their offspring. Gratitude was to be retained in each passing generation, as they remembered God's past goodness toward their fathers, and as they experienced God's present blessings in their own lives.

At the time the Passover was instituted, the people understood and responded to God's goodness. "So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the Lord

had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.” An understanding and appreciation of God’s goodness will lead to goodness in the grateful recipient of that goodness. Such understanding and appreciation will prompt man to obey God’s Will in worshiping and serving out of a heart filled to overflowing with gratitude. Such was the case initially with the soon- to- be liberated Israelites.

However, not long after leaving the land of bondage, when hemmed in against the Red Sea by the pursuing Egyptian armies, the Israelites murmured against Moses and God:

And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. Then they said to Moses, because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? “Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness (Exod. 14:10-12).

Could the God who smote the Egyptians earlier not deliver them now at the Red Sea? Why should they have feared? Their forgetfulness concerning God’s goodness toward them in Egypt produced a groundless fear which God soon eliminated. He instructed Moses to lift his rod and stretch it over the waters to divide them before the eyes of His forgetful and suddenly faithless followers. After the people crossed the Red Sea on dry land, and after they had seen their enemies destroyed before them, once again they rejoiced with gratitude to God for His deliverance.

God's deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea was known by both His people and the inhabitants of the land to which God would eventually guide the second generation. This deliverance was surpassed only by the one accomplished by our Lord in dying on the cross for the sins of the world. Yet, the impact of such an event would be soon forgotten by the Jews. Time and again they would murmur and rebel, not considering the goodness of God.

The Goodness Of God In Leviticus

As we continue our journey through the Pentateuch, we see in Leviticus the goodness of God in giving the people a priesthood, a place to approach the Father in worship, and a system of sacrifices which allowed sinful man to have fellowship with a sinless God. It was God's desire that His people be holy, looking to Him as the perfect standard of holiness. It is also clear from the following statement in Leviticus that God's goodness was to motivate them to be good, or holy:

For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy (Lev. 11:44-45).

Notice the emphasis God places upon His deliverance of His people from Egypt. Then He tells them: "You shall therefore be holy..."! Their gratitude should have caused them to offer the sacrifices willingly and lovingly, based upon the realization that "the goodness of God endures continually." The book of Leviticus does not reveal a system of sacrifice that was to be followed ritualistically, but one

which was to be engaged in enthusiastically by a grateful people. Another passage from the prophet Isaiah clearly shows this to be true. In this text, as in the parable in Isaiah chapter 5, God asks a question:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? says the Lord. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood (Isa. 1:11-15).

God was not telling His people He did not require sacrifice. He was expressing through the prophet His displeasure over their obvious insincerity and lack of love which was evident in their lives. Yes, they offered the sacrifices God had commanded, but their hearts were far from Him. Therefore, the Lord told them:

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as wool. If you are

willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken (Isa. 1:16-20).

God's promise to cleanse them from their evil ways was contingent upon their becoming willingly obedient to His Law. Throughout the Scriptures, God emphasizes the necessity of willing and loving service. The Law detailed in Leviticus was a law given through the goodness of God and designed to make man good and, therefore, grateful!

The Goodness Of God In Numbers

In Numbers, the fourth book of the Pentateuch, the goodness of God is evident in the provisions God made for Israel's journey through the wilderness. The numbering of the people proved that God was multiplying them as He had promised to do. Every blessing of God upon Israel in the wilderness should have strengthened their faith. Yet, their faith faltered repeatedly. Finally, after the faithless reaction to the report of the spies, God condemned the first generation to wander and die without seeing the promised land. "Then the Lord said to Moses: how long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them" (Num. 14:11)?

The signs God performed among them should have produced deeper faith and gratitude in those who saw them. His provision of food and water and the victories He gave them over their enemies were testimonies of His goodness, to which they ultimately failed to respond. In Numbers 21, when the people became discouraged because of their journey, they spoke against God and Moses. After God sent the fiery serpents among them, they cried out, "...we have sinned." Moses prayed for the people, and God

provided a way of escape through the brazen serpent which He instructed Moses to make. Those who looked upon the serpent, as God had commanded, lived. But, once again, their gratitude for their deliverance did not endure.

In Numbers 25, the incident of idolatry and harlotry is recorded:

Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods (Num. 25:1-2).

Thus, once more having spurned the goodness of God, the Israelites saw His severity as thousands died.

The Goodness Of God In Deuteronomy

In the final book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, we find Moses reminding Israel of the wonderful demonstrations of God's goodness toward them in the wilderness. In the first chapter of the book, in one of Moses' farewell addresses to the people, he reviews the history of God's dealings with the first faithless generation of Israelites. As part of the account of what had taken place in the wilderness, Moses includes the report of the spies who were sent into Canaan. In recounting their reaction to the report of the spies, Moses depicts the misconceptions God's people had about His attitude toward them.

Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God; and you complained in your tents, and said, because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts,

saying, the people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there. Then I said to you, do not be terrified, or afraid of them. The Lord your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes (Deut. 1:26-30).

How tragically ironic it was that God's people believed God had brought them out of Egypt because He hated them! Everything God had done for them demonstrated His goodness and love toward them. Then, notice what Moses continued to present to the people concerning God's dealings with them in the wilderness:

And in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place. Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God, who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day (Deut. 1:31).

These passages provide an inspired commentary on Israel's continual sin of ingratitude, based upon their failure to understand an eternal principle revealed by the psalmist: "Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord" (Psm. 107:43). The first verse of this psalm admonishes: "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." The things Israel had been blessed to observe should have convinced them of God's goodness and should have given them a grateful understanding of the lovingkindness of the Lord.

Moses sought to remind the second generation of

Israelites of God's goodness toward His people in
Deuteronomy 6:20-25:

When your son asks you in time to come, saying, what is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you? then you shall say to your son: we were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us (Deut. 6:20-25).

Gratitude to God was to be taught to every generation. They were to understand that the Law of God was given for their good by a God whose goodness endures continually. However, as we consider the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5, it is clear that such teaching was not done by every generation. Therefore, God, in Isaiah's time, asked the rhetorical question: "What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?" Everything God had done from the beginning of His creation was more than sufficient proof of His goodness, mercy, and love toward Israel. Therefore, the captivity into which He carried them was a result of their rebellion against the goodness of God which did not lead a stubborn people to repentance.

Christ---The Culmination Of God's Goodness

However, God did not forget His promise to both Jew and Gentile. He showed His ultimate goodness in the giving of His only begotten Son. In a New Testament parable, Jesus also used the figure of a vineyard to depict a continually rebellious Jewish people. The parable begins in Matthew 21:33:

There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

This parable, similar to the one in Isaiah 5, depicts God as the landowner entrusting His vineyard to those who should have prepared it to produce a harvest; yet, they utterly failed in their responsibility. The Jews rejected every manifestation of God's goodness, and they ultimately killed the very Son of God, who came as the culmination of God's goodness and love. As in former days, the Lord's vineyard in the days of our Lord brought forth the fruits of rebellion, rather than the sweet "grapes" of gratitude and loving obedience.

Today, the Lord's vineyard is the church, depicted in another of our Lord's parables in Matthew 20:1-16. The parable compares the kingdom of heaven, the church, to a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. One of the great lessons of this parable is that the Lord, as has always been the case, does not force anyone to labor in His vineyard. It is his desire that those who enter the vineyard do so willingly, based upon the realization of the goodness of God, who has done everything necessary to motivate the sinner to obey. Out of His goodness, God offers an eternal reward to those who willingly enter and lovingly labor to the end of day.

Another point of this beautiful parable is that one should enter the vineyard at the first opportunity he is given. And if one understands the goodness of God, he will surely enter the vineyard upon the first hearing of the Lord's gracious offer of redemption.

What more could God have done than to give His only begotten Son to make possible the salvation of mankind? The Son of God has been lifted up from the earth to draw all men to the Father through Him. In John 3, Jesus compared His death on Calvary to the lifting up of the brazen serpent back in the wilderness: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14,15). The brazen serpent which brought physical relief to the penitent in the wilderness typified the greater relief from sin which would come through the Christ. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). It was never God's intention to drive men to serve Him, but to draw men through the cross where His Son shed His precious blood.

What more could God have done? Paul affirms that the goodness of God is more than sufficient to motivate the sinner to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized for the remission of his sins. Then, his guilt is transformed into loving and lasting gratitude. On Pentecost, those who heard the good news for the first time cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They were told to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Then, Acts 2:41 reveals: "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."

Guilt was transformed into gladness as receptive hearts heard the terms of pardon, and some 3,000 were

added to the Lord's vineyard, the church. Their gratitude for God's goodness in blotting out their transgressions motivated them to continue steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles. Their love for one another, for God, and for Christ, was evident, and they had favor with all the people.

Those of us living today should reflect soberly upon the question God asked Israel long ago: "What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it?" If God expected His people then to respond to His goodness toward them by gratefully and lovingly obeying, how much more does He expect of us, as we bask in the full sunlight of His goodness in the Christian age? We not only read of God's goodness in His Word, but we now realize it through its perfect demonstration in the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God. Truly, it will be more tolerable in the judgment for Sodom than for us, if we fail to respond to the goodness of God. From the Creation to Calvary and from Calvary to His Coming, "...the goodness of God endures continually."

CHAPTER 32

THE SEVERITY OF GOD

PAUL SAIN

SINCERE APPRECIATION IS EXPRESSED to this fine eldership, to my dear friend B. J. Clarke and to this outstanding congregation for the invitation to participate in this wonderful series of lessons. Your efforts for good is great. Your teaching of the gospel reaches around the world. Your faithfulness is a beacon light to so many. Be fully aware of the great love of so many for you.

Introduction

The question is often asked, *“How can God be a loving God and damn someone to hell?”* Or, *“How can God be loving and allow so much suffering, sickness and sin?”* Further, someone asks, *“Why did God allow this to happen to me and my family?”* We would add the following: *“Will God deal with us as He did the children of Israel, punishing the disobedient?”* *“Will He really condemn anyone to eternal torment?”* *“Is God really a God of goodness and severity?”* Friends, these questions, and additional ones, we shall endeavor to answer with the Scriptures.

The Attributes Of God

One said long ago that how we conceive of God determines the kind and quality of religion we will have. So first let us explore a few things the Bible states

concerning our heavenly Almighty Father. By so doing, this will picture for us more clearly the One with whom we are speaking.

Little children have often been taught the precious prayer to be offered before mealtime, “*God is great. God is good. And we thank Him for our food.*” Immediately we notice two excellent attributes of God: great and good. Jehovah God is great (Deut. 5:24). He is good (Psm. 145:9; 33:5). He is also holy (1 Peter 1:16), merciful (Rom. 12:1), just (Acts 10:34-35), gracious (Psm. 84:11), loving (John 3:16), perfect (Matt. 5:48), righteous (Psm. 19:9), longsuffering (Rom. 15:5), compassionate (Psm. 78:38-39), kind (Psm. 42:8) and faithful (1 Cor. 1:9). Certainly this list does not exhaust the descriptive words which accurately apply to our Creator.

For our present study we must add an additional descriptive word: *severity*. Follow the thoughts in these verses:

Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God:
on them which fell, severity; but toward thee,
goodness, if thou continue in his goodness:
otherwise thou also shalt be cut off (Rom. 11:22).

“Goodness” is directly contrasted to “severity.” The characteristics appear as if contradictory and unable to be manifested simultaneously. Such is not the case. God is good. But friends, know for a certainty that God is also severe.

“*Goodness*” is from the Greek “*chrestotes*” which refers to God’s kindness. Passages which help us understand God’s goodness would include portions of three epistles written by the apostle Paul: Ephesians 2:6-7; Titus 3:4; and Romans 2:4.

“*Severity*” is from the Greek word “*apotomia*” which

means “*roughness, rigor, cutting off.*” From Hebrews 2:2 we are reminded that “**every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.**” God’s love offers salvation. God’s grace and mercy offered pardon to sinful, rebellious man ~ **if** he would turn from his sinful ways. God’s justice demands punishment (severity) if and when man rejects and turns to ways he chooses. In Romans 11:22 (previously given) the severity of God (cut off) was to be upon those “who fell” versus those who continued in His goodness.

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28).

God is not **only always** good and loving toward man, regardless of his actions. Ones who reject God and His way will be cast into the eternal hell. In this study we will note several who died physically because of their unbelief and rebellion. But most definitely be aware that the greater concern and fear should be to lose one’s soul eternally in hell.

Jehovah God is a **Spirit** (John 4:23-24; Luke 24:39), **omnipotent** (all-powerful, Psm. 89:8; Gen. 18:14), **omniscient** (knows everything, Rom. 8:27; Heb. 4:13), **omnipresent** (exists everywhere, Psm. 139:7-10; Acts 17:27) and **immutable** (changeless, James 1:17; Eccl. 3:14).

Almost 2,000 years ago, Jesus asked,

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, **Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?** And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the

prophets. He saith unto them, **But whom say ye that I am?** (Matt. 16:13-15, emp mine, PS).

Did the disciples reply, “*You are the eschatological manifestation of the ground of our being, the kerygma in which we find the ultimate meaning of our interpersonal relationship.*”? If they had so replied, the Lord might have said, “*What?*” Our Lord said simply, “*I am your God!*”

While there are many “gods,” there is only one true God. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deut. 6:4). As the children of Israel were admonished to do, we must likewise place our faith and trust in this One God and hold tenaciously to Him only.

As Creator, our heavenly Father has the right to declare His sovereignty and demand allegiance of man. He has the right to instruct, require, and demand of His created beings whatever He desires, concerning: worship and praise offered to Him, what is “**right**” and what is “**wrong**,” how we must treat our fellow-man, laws of marriage and the home, etc.

God spoke to Israel centuries ago,

...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live (Deut. 30:19).

We must also emphasize God is righteous and just. “Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face” (Psm. 89:14). Man often acts unjustly and is partial. Jehovah does not so act. He is just.

God has instructed us and requires of us only that which is good and best for us. He does not wish evil on us. He wants all to be happy and blessed, in this life and throughout eternity (1 Tim. 2:4).

**Through The History Of Man
We See Various Times
When God's Severity Was Demonstrated!**

If there is a particle of doubt that God is able to deal harshly and severe with rebellious, sinful man, then we plead with you to turn to the Holy Bible and begin reading. You likely will not travel far in this great inspired book before confronting a record of actual events which reflect God's willingness (necessity) to punish, even severely punish wicked mankind. Remember as you reflect on these events of the past that we are to learn from this inspired record (Rom. 15:4). Let's note a few such examples.

Adam and Eve

God placed the created couple in the beautiful garden of Eden, the utopian state of paradise. God told them they could enjoy everything **except** the fruit of one tree in the center of the garden. Satan (in the form of a serpent) came and told Eve, regardless of what Jehovah has told you, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). Eve was deceived and ate of the forbidden fruit (v. 6) and gave also to her husband (v. 6b). Their eyes were opened and they were naked (v. 7). They tried to hide from God (v. 8). They admitted they had eaten the fruit of the forbidden tree (vs. 11-13). God punished the serpent (v. 14). God punished Eve (v. 16). God punished Adam (v. 17-19). God drove them out of the garden of Eden (vs. 23-24).

Some today might argue and defend Adam and Eve with claims that the action was too severe; they were only guilty of one mistake; the serpent caused them to do it; they did not realize from experience that God really meant what He said. Arguments can be made, but the record still stands ~ God punished them severely!

Wicked People In The Days Of Noah

With the passing of time, the “wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). It repented God, grieving Him at His heart, that He had made man (v. 6). God’s reaction to the great wickedness was simple, total devastation of all that was evil (v. 7). Noah (a just man, righteous and perfect and who walked with God, v. 9; 7:1) found grace in the eyes of the Lord (v. 8). The earth was flooded (7:18ff) destroying all evil from the face of the earth. God’s punishment and action was very severe!

Nadab and Abihu

The sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu (Num. 3:2-3) were to minister in the priest’s office. Their “**crime**” is recorded in Leviticus 10:1-2:

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and **offered strange fire** before the Lord, **which he commanded them not**. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (emp. mine, PS).

Folks today might suggest that such action was so trivial, quite insignificant. They might further state that they did other things which were right and according to the instruction given them. But the opinions and viewpoints of man do not matter. God had spoken. God is demanding. God expects “**exact**” obedience. Partial obedience is merely disobedience. So what happened to Nadab and Abihu? “And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord” (Lev. 10:2). They died ~ because of disobedience! The

severity of God is emphatically demonstrated again and again.

Sodom and Gomorrah

The mere names of the cities are synonymous with evil and corruption. To “**sodomize**” or be a “**sodomite**” aligns oneself with wickedness and rebellion against God (Gen. 19:13-24). Let the Scriptures remind us what the Lord did to these corrupt people:

Then the LORD **rained** upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah **brimstone and fire from the LORD** out of heaven; And he **overthrew those cities**, and all the plain, and **all the inhabitants of the cities**, and **that which grew upon the ground**. (Genesis 19:24-25, emp. mine, PS).

Liberal minded folks today might suggest they were merely living an “**alternate life-style**” or they were victims of traumatic child-rearing experiences. Foolishness! They were living wicked, evil, horrible, rebellious, ungodly lives before God Almighty and He would not tolerate it any longer! **The severity of God!**

Uzzah

The Biblical record we have is found in 2 Samuel 6:3-8:

And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and **Uzzah** and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, **drave the new cart**. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of

instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And **when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it;** for the oxen shook it. And **the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.** And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perezuzzah to this day.

The ark was **not** to be touched. Numbers 4:15 states, "...they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die..." Moses had delivered the written law unto the priests (Deut. 31:9). Those involved with the ark of the covenant **knew** they were not to touch the ark. Though it might be argued that Uzzah was merely trying to keep it from falling, God had spoken! Contrast the faith of Abraham, Daniel's friends, and others. Abraham knew that Isaac was important, but God had instructed him to take his life. Abraham knew that God could raise him up. Daniel's friends knew the fire was hot, and they might perish. But they knew God was able to prevent it if it was His will. Their faith extended to the point that if it were not God's will to prevent them from perishing, they knew He knew best.

We go back to 1 Samuel 6:19 and find a similar situation to Uzzah and touching the ark of the covenant:

And he smote the men of Bethshemesh, because **they had looked into the ark of the Lord,** even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.

God smote 50,070 men because “**they had looked into the ark.**” God demands total, complete, full, nothing less than absolute obedience!

Children of Israel

Time after time, cycle after cycle, we read of the Israelites rebelling against Almighty God. They would be oppressed or taken into captivity. Then they would cry out for deliverance, and God would hear their cry. Soon after being delivered, they would fall away from faithfulness. And the cycle would begin again. During these various times, Jehovah God would deal **severely** with the children of Israel. Note a few examples in Scripture:

Thine own **wickedness** shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou **hast forsaken the Lord** thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts (Jer. 2:19, emp. mine, PS).

...**thou hast polluted the land** with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness. (Jer. 3:2, emp. mine, PS).

Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord...they have **forgotten the Lord** their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings... (Jer. 3:20-22, emp. mine, PS).

For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to **do evil**, but to do good they have no knowledge (Jer. 4:22, emp. mine, PS).

But this people hath a **revolting and a rebellious heart**; they are revolted and gone....Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you (Jer. 5:23,25, emp. mine, PS).

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and **my people love to have it so**: and what will ye do in the end thereof? (Jer. 5:31, emp. mine, PS).

...every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealt falsely....saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when **they had committed abomination**? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them **they shall be cast down, saith the Lord**. Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. **But they said, We will not walk therein**. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, **We will not hearken**. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, **I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it** (Jer. 6:13-19, emp. mine, PS).

Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, **mine anger and my fury shall be poured out** upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be

quenched (Jer. 7:20, emp. mine, PS).

But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: **at his wrath the earth shall tremble**, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation (Jer. 10:10, emp. mine, PS).

Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and **destroy thee**; I am **weary with repenting** (Jer. 15:6).

Let us learn from the massive emphasis Jehovah has placed upon His love for His faithful ones, but His anger and fury for the rebellious wicked ones (Rom. 15:4).

Achan and his Family

In the book of Joshua we learn the children of Israel suffered because of the sin of Achan, of the tribe of Judah. Achan took of the **“accursed thing”** (v. 1), and put it among their own stuff (v. 11). The anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel. He told them, **“there is an accursed thing in the midst of thee”** (v. 13).

When confronted, Achan admitted that when he saw the Babylonish garment, 200 shekels of silver, a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight that he coveted after them and took them. He brought them home and buried it all in the earth in the midst of his tent. Sin often enters the eye, sinks into the heart, activates the hand, and leads to secrets and lies, and finally damnation!

Joshua and all of Israel took Achan, the silver, garment, gold, his sons and daughters, oxen, asses, sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the valley of Achor (v. 24). All Israel stoned them and then burned them with fire (v. 25).

Moses

We recall fondly many “**faithful**” and God-fearing actions of this one found in the “Hall of Faith” of Hebrews 11. He pled for the Israelites’ freedom before Pharaoh. Finally, he led the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. He withstood the murmuring and complaining of the people. He endured the failing of Aaron and the people building the golden calf. But tragically we also remember the act of disobedience of Moses.

And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he **smote the rock twice**: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also (Num. 20:11).

Various arguments could easily convince the majority that his action was certainly not worthy of being refused entrance into the promised land (v. 12). In fact, striking the rock was the specific instruction given by Jehovah in the previous occurrence. But God called it “**unbelief**” (Heb. 3:17-19).

King Solomon

King Solomon loved many strange women (1 Kings 11:1). He had 700 wives, princesses and 300 concubines. God had instructed King Solomon, “Ye shall not go into them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods...” (v. 2). The king ignored the warning from God and the result was:

...his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that **his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD** his God, as was the heart of David his father (1

Kings 11:3b-4, emp. mine, PS).

Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord (I Kings 11:6). He went not fully after the Lord (v. 6). He built a high place for and offered sacrifices unto Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon (vs. 7-8). The Lord was angry with Solomon (v. 9). God told him,

...Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, **I will surely rend the kingdom from thee**, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son....(1 Kings 11:11-14).

God was serious about King Solomon doing exactly what He had been commanded to do. He lost the kingdom because of the **severity of God!**

King Ahab

Naboth had a vineyard which King Ahab (of Samaria) wanted very badly. Naboth would not sell nor trade it (1 Kings 21:1-3). Ahab was extremely sad and displeased (v. 4). Jezebel, his wife, took matters into her hands and through lies and deceit had Naboth stoned to death. Jezebel told Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth" (v. 15). God spoke to Ahab through his servant Elijah (vs. 17-18) and told him,

And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, **In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood**, even thine (1 Kings 21:19, emp. mine, PS).

Concerning Jezebel, the Lord said, **“The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel”** (v. 23).

The Holy Record says of Ahab there **“was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols...”** (1 Kings 21:25-26a). We see again and again **the severity of God** toward rebellious, sinful people.

King Saul

God anointed Saul to be king over His people (1 Sam. 15:1). He told him to hearken (listen) to the words of the Lord. God told King Saul:

Now go and smite Amalek, and **utterly destroy all that they have**, and **spare them not**; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass (1 Sam. 15:3, emp. mine, PS).

King Saul smote the Amalekites (v. 7) but took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive (v. 8). He also spared the best of the sheep, oxen fatlings, lambs and all that was good (v. 9). Everything that was vile and refuse he utterly destroyed.

God was sorry that He had made Saul king (v. 11). God stately simply, “he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments” (v. 11). When Samuel confronted King Saul the next morning, Saul said **“I have performed the commandment of the Lord”** (v. 13). Samuel asked about the sound of sheep and oxen he heard. King Saul placed the blame on the people, saying “they have brought them ... to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God...” (v. 15). Samuel then told King

Saul what God said and felt about his action: He had done evil in the sight of the Lord. Saul argued that **“I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me ... and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites”** (v. 20). Again he blamed the people for taking “of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief things **which should have been utterly destroyed...**” (v. 21). Samuel told him “...to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (v. 22). He called his action rebellion and stubbornness and said because he had **rejected the word of the Lord**, he hath also rejected thee from being king (v. 23). Verse 35 again repeats “...the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.” God demands obedience! God will punish and/or reject those who disobey!

Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 5:1-11 records the actions of this couple who had obeyed the gospel of Christ. They were New Testament Christians. But they conceived in their heart (v. 4). They sinned as they allowed their love for money (1 Tim. 6:10) to prompt them to lie to the Holy Ghost (v. 3); tempting the Spirit of the Lord (v. 9). Satan had filled their heart (v. 3). Ananias was told that he had not lied to men, but to God (v. 4). After he heard this, he died (v. 5)! About three hours later, his wife, Sapphira came in (v. 7). She made the same claim to Peter and she also died (v. 10).

Why would God do that, some might ask? Wasn't that rather drastic and harsh action, others might inquire? Friends, God will not tolerate sin, lies, deceit, etc.! God has in the past and will in the future deal severely with wicked ones!

Judgment Day

In the New Testament we are clearly warned of

the events of the judgment day. Known in many references as “the day of the Lord,” (2 Peter 3:10), “the great day,” (Jude 6), “that day,” (2 Thess. 3:10), “the day of wrath,” (Rom. 2:5), “the last day,” (John 6:39-54), etc.

Judgment is certain to come (Acts 17:30-31). It is an appointment that all will keep (Heb. 9:27). We must all appear before the judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). Christ will judge everyone (2 Tim. 4:1; John 5:22), the living and the dead (2 Tim. 4:1), unbelievers (2 Thess. 2:12), fornicators and adulterers (Heb. 13:4). All shall give account to God (Rom. 14:10-12). The judgment will be righteous and true (Rev. 16:7; 1 Peter 2:23). Judgment will begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17).

The righteous will be separated from the unrighteous (Matt. 10:34-35). For the faithful, judgment will be a “**gain**” (Phil. 1:21). The crown will be received (2 Tim. 4:6-8). God’s obedient will have confidence in that day (1 John 4:17).

The wicked will receive their due reward. They will be sent to a place of eternal torment and destruction (Rev. 14:11; Matt. 10:28), everlasting fire and brimstone (Matt 8:12; Matt 25:46), outer darkness (Matt. 25:30), a lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15), where the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:47-48).

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when **the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction** from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:7-9, emp. mine, PS).

Hell will be for eternity! It will begin and never end! We measure time in days, weeks, months and years.

As the beautiful song “*Amazing Grace*” conveys in the last verse, “*When we’ve been there ten thousand years ... we’ve only just begun.*”

Note the terms “**everlasting**” and “**eternal**” in the passages cited concerning the punishment of the wicked.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, **Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire**, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And **these shall go away into everlasting punishment**: but the righteous into life **eternal** (Matt. 25:41-46, emp. mine, PS).

The severity of God will be known one day by the masses of people who have sought to live life to the fullest in pleasures of sin (Heb. 11:24f), and have wanted only to “**get all the gusto**” they could during their brief life. If it felt good to them, they did it. They did not realize immediate punishment from their actions so they were lulled into a false security. They felt that God was a “*loving*” God who would never condemn, damn or send anyone to eternal punishment. Many had a knowledge of God but did not believe it was necessary to take action quickly and immediately; they thought they had plenty of time.

In the song, “*There’s A Great Day Coming*,” the last

verse gives a view of the day it will be for the lost. It will be a **“sad day”** when the sinner shall hear his doom, **“Depart, I know you not.”**

The severity of God upon the wicked in judgment will be **final** ~ there is no changing the sentence or turning back. The Great Judge will have spoken. There is no higher Judge. There is no appeal process available. Absolute and certain is the decree that shall be heard on that day.

Jehovah God ~ “How Great Thou Art!”

Thrilling to the ears of the faithful followers is to hear the ageless song, *“How Great Thou Art.”* When we in awesome wonder consider all the things He has done for us. Unbelievable! He is great! His power is **“exceeding great”** (Eph. 1:19). He is able to do **“exceeding abundantly”** above all that we ask or think (Eph. 3:20). His grace is **“exceeding abundant”** (1 Tim. 1:14). His promises are **“exceeding great and precious”** (2 Peter 1:4). He gives us an **“exceeding and eternal”** weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17). One day He will present us faultless before the presence of His glory with **“exceeding joy”** (Jude 24).