



## **The Attributes of God ~ Greatness (cont.)**

### **The Spirituality of God**

God is both spiritual and personal. Now what do I mean by that? God is Spirit. “*God is Spirit,*” John 4:24 says. This means that God is not physical. Does God have physical features? Obviously we see parts of Him, like His hands or His face, talked about Scripture, but these are anthropomorphisms. Anthropomorphism is basically a big theological term that means that the Bible uses physical terms that we would be familiar with to describe God, but He is Spirit. He is not physical.

The Bible teaches that God is not visible. He is the King eternal, immortal, invisible, because He is Spirit. In this sense, He is unlike us. We are unlike Him. He alone is immortal, and lives in unapproachable light, 1 Timothy 6 says. We see God revealing Himself in different ways, just like we talked about. We see Him reveal Himself through creation. We even see theophanies—God revealing Himself like we talked about in Joshua 5, when Joshua encounters a man who’s representing God. But the picture is, in Scripture, God is not visible, not physical. God has no size or dimensions, even infinite ones. God is not described in size or dimensions at all. We’ll talk about that more when we talk about His omnipresence. But He is not limited to any geographical or spatial location.

God is not destructible. He is pure being. He is the fullness, the essence of being. He is literally, “excellence of being,” but He is Spirit. That’s what we mean by spirituality.

Not just Spirit though, the danger is that when we think of Him as Spirit, we might misunderstand who God is. He is Spirit, and He is a Person. Meaning, when we think about God as Spirit, we can’t think about as a force. God is not some force to be reckoned with. God is not an object to be manipulated. He is not some bureau, or department, or machine that you do this certain thing with. Sometimes we even think this in the way we pray. We think, “If I just keep putting bills in the machine, then something’s going to come out the way I want it to come out.” That is not the way God is pictured.

God is a Person to be loved. This is huge. Even when we think about the gospel, and how we are selling the gospel today in our church culture, that we need to get away from. We often present the gospel as, “If you come to Christ, you can get heaven. If you come to Christ, you can get forgiveness of sins. If you come to Christ, you can get your best life now. If you come to Christ, you can get these things.”

It’s all not true! You come to Christ to get God! You come to Christ to get a person, not things. We have taken God, Himself, out of the gospel and put His gifts in there instead. Now yes, heaven and forgiveness of sin and abundant life, those are good things. But they all flow from God, as a person. You come to Christ to get God. God is Spirit and Person. He is a person to be loved.

Next you have God and images. Now, this fact that He is Spirit is one of the reasons why, when you look at Exodus 20 in the Ten Commandments, and you see images and idols

forbidden, you see that it's because God is unlike anything else in all creation. Therefore God forbids using anything else in all creation to picture Him.

Now we live in an image rich culture, and we have to be careful. You can't represent God pictorially, with images. It is idolatry to do that, because God is not like anything else. You don't say, "Well when I picture God, I picture Him like this." No! That's idolatry. You don't picture God. We've got to resist that.

J.I. Packer said, "The second commandment is the summons to recognize that God, the Creator, is transcended, mysterious, and inscrutable beyond the range of any imagining or philosophical guesswork of which we are capable." God's people should not picture Him here, because we long for the day when we will see Him. 1 John 3:2, says, "...*We will see Him as He is.*" Revelations 22:4 says, "*They will see His face...*" The question is how do you see one who is invisible? We'll leave that for heaven to reveal.

### **The Eternity of God**

God is both infinite and eternal. This is going to kind of feed into the omnipresence, omnibenevolence, and omniscience of God, but God is infinite. "*Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave—what can you know?"* (Job 11:7-8).

What the Bible teaches is that God is unlimited. He has no limits. He's not only unlimited, but God is unlimitable. There are no limits to God, and His love. There are no limits to God, and His greatness. God is measureless. You can't talk about amount, or size, or weight, or degrees when you speak about God. There's nothing in God that is less or more. There is nothing in God that is large or small. He is measureless. God is boundless. David Wells said, "It is this God, majestic and holy in His Being, this God whose love knows no bounds because His holiness knows no limits, who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world." He is infinite, unlimitable, unlimited, boundless, measureless, and eternal.

God is eternal. We saw this earlier in Psalm 90:1-2, "...*from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*" And this is where we get into God's relationship to time and I'll be honest, to think about God as He relates to time is just one big headache waiting to happen. I'll never forget sitting in a Ph.D. seminar, on the doctrine of God, where we spent about three weeks talking about God, as He relates to time. It was heavy stuff, thick stuff, and I would just find myself clueless in some of these discussions.

I remember we got to one point where there were about four options we were discussing that different Christians believe about God's relationship to time. They were A, B, C, and D. So the professor said, "We're just going to go around the table, and we're going to ask you guys to share which one you believe." And I'm thinking, "Oh, I don't have any clue what A, B, C or D mean, much less which one I believe." And so thankfully, about five guys went before me and the majority of them said "B", so I said, "Well of course, it's 'B'." I didn't even know what "B" was. So, all that to say, keep that in mind when we're talking about God and time. I am fairly clueless.

God as eternal. What Scripture teaches is that God has no beginning—we've already seen that—and that God has no end. "Beginning" and "end" do not apply to God. The way I would describe it is Scripture teaches that God is Lord over time. God has no past, and God has no future. Everything in some sense is present in the consciousness of God. Time does not affect God, because He always has been what He always is, and what He always will be. There is, in some sense, a sense of always being present. God is unchanging throughout all

time. Time does not affect God, or His knowledge. Over time we grow in knowledge. God doesn't grow in knowledge over time. Time does not affect Him like that. We're going to talk about the unchangeability of God even deeper in a second.

God sees all time equally vividly. This kind of springs from this idea of God, and that in His consciousness, He is always present. He sees the past with equal clarity as He sees the future. From all of eternity God has determined what He is now doing. He's never responding to actions. He is never thinking, "Okay, let me wait see what David does here, and then I'll see what I'm going to do." That doesn't pertain to God. For all eternity God has determined what He is now doing.

God sees all time equally vividly, but at the same time, God sees events in the context of time and God acts in the context of time. That's what we see all throughout Scripture. We see Him acting at different points of time in different ways. At the same time, He sees all time equally vividly. If you understand all of that, then congratulations. It's late, and you've conquered God and time.

The reality is, we will always exist in time. This makes us different from God. I put these truths together. If God is infinitely and eternally glorious, infinitely and eternally holy, infinitely and eternally just, and infinitely and eternally gracious, then three things are true. Number one, our sin is infinitely and eternally offensive to Him. One sin against God is an infinite offense. If you sin against a rock, you're not very guilty. If you sin against a man, you are very guilty. If you sin against God, you are infinitely guilty!

As a result, His wrath is infinitely and eternally just toward us. This is the picture of Genesis 3. God says, "One sin and you will surely die." And we think, "Doesn't that seem a little extreme? One sin?" You even look in different parts of the Old Testament, someone sin's once, and the affects are so rampant, they're so strong, and we think, "It's almost overdoing it a little bit." That's because we look at Scripture with man-centered eyes, as opposed to God-centered eyes. Don't forget, ladies and gentlemen, Romans 5 tells us that it was one sin that brought condemnation for all men of all time. Billions of people condemned for all time because of one sin.

It was one sin that brought all the evil and suffering that we're going to talk about later, into the world. Tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, suffering, disease, all as the result of one sin. And in this room together, collectively, we have committed thousands, upon thousands of sins. His wrath is infinitely and eternally just toward us.

Sin, infinitely offensive in His sight. God, infinitely just in His wrath against us. The beauty of it is in our salvation. When we're saved from this kind of sin, our salvation is infinitely and eternally satisfying.

I love this quote of Steven Charnock in *Discourse On the Eternity of God*. That is one thick book, and this is a thick quote. Just follow along with it.

When we enjoy God, we enjoy him in his eternity without any flux... Time is fluid, but eternity is stable; and after many ages, the joys will be as savory and satisfying as if they had been but that moment first tasted by our hungry appetites. When the glory of the Lord shall rise upon you, it shall be so far from ever setting, that after millions of years are expired, as numerous as the sands on the seashore, the sun, in the light of whose countenance you shall live, shall be as bright as at the first appearance; he will be so far from ceasing to flow, that he will flow as strong, as full, as at the first

communication of himself in glory to the creature. God is always vigorous and flourishing; a pure act of life, sparkling new and fresh rays of life and light to the creature, flourishing with a perpetual spring, and contenting the most capacious desire; forming your interest, pleasure, and satisfaction; with an infinite variety, without any change or succession; he will have variety to increase delights, and eternity to perpetuate them; this will be the fruit of the enjoyment of an infinite and eternal God.

You look at Psalm 90, I would encourage you to go back, look at that Psalm. It starts off by saying "From everlasting to everlasting you are God." When it ends, it says "*Teach us the number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom*" (Ps. 90:12). The eternity of God reminds us—our days are numbered. It's a radically different way to live when you live in light of eternity. You look at things very differently when you look at them in the light of eternity.

"We who live in this nervous age", Tozer said, "would be wise to meditate on our lives and our days long and often before the face of God and on the edge of eternity." Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd both said, "Meditate often on eternity." It will have a radical affect on your life.

### **The Omnipotence of God**

This is getting into His infinite eternal power. God has infinite power to do all things in His holy will. That last part is important, because there are some things God cannot do. It doesn't mean He's stripped of His omnipotence. We're going to talk about those things in just a second.

This picture in Genesis 18, it's God's power to provide for Sarah and Abraham, who are getting pretty old, a child. You also have the picture of Jeremiah 32:17, "...*You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm.*" Or you have Jesus essentially saying, "There's nothing impossible with Go" (Matt. 19:26). Scripture teaches that God's power extends over all creation. All creation is under the power of God, and it extends through all history. Acts 17:26, "*From one man, he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.*" Psalm 115:3, "*Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases Him.*" His power is over all creation through all history, over everything.

Now what can God not do? One, God cannot undo the past. If He did change the past He would be acknowledging that He messed up in the past. So He can't undo the past. He can't deny His character. God can't deny who He is. He can't be unfaithful. He can't cease to exist. All these attributes can't change in Him. He can't deny who He is. 2 Timothy 2:13 reminds us, "He cannot disown Himself." He is always faithful and third, He cannot deceive His people. God cannot lie, Titus and Hebrews tell us. Praise God, He cannot fail to do what He has promised in our lives.

These are not just truths on a piece of paper. This is not just theory. These are the attributes of God, and knowledge of them radically affects the way we relate to Him, and understand Him, and know Him, and live under Him.

### **The Omnipresence of God**

All of God is always present. You have Psalm 139:7-10 saying, "*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up in the heavens, you are there; If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on*

*the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."*

Now what this is not saying, look at it closely, is that part of God is present over here, and part of God is present over there, and part of God is present over here in the world. All of God is always present. "Where can I go from your Spirit, from your presence?" the psalmist asks. Nowhere. There's nowhere I can go to escape your presence, the psalmist says. God talks about it in Acts 7:48, "*I don't live in houses made by human hands.*" In 1 Kings 18, Elijah is with the prophets of Baal, and he says, "*Where is your god? Maybe he is busy or he's traveling.*" But the words in the original language of the Old Testament literally say, "Maybe he is in the restroom." And so the idea is, "Maybe your god is on the using the bathroom, but my God is everywhere."

God cannot be contained or described by spatial dimensions. We don't think about God in space, even in infinite space. Space doesn't apply to God, because He's omnipresent. God is present everywhere but distinct from everything. This is not Pantheism, or panentheism, which basically says God is in all. I have had numerous conversations in the French Quarter of New Orleans with people. Some of them intoxicated, some of them not intoxicated, and they would say things like, "Man, God's in everything. God's in you, He's in me. He's in the trash can." That's not what we're saying about the omnipresence of God. He is present everywhere, but He is distinct from everything. And God's presence is manifested differently in different circumstances.

Now, if God is omnipresent, then is there any place where He is not present? No. That pretty much covers it. But, God's presence is manifested differently in different circumstances. Colossians 1:17 says that sometimes God is present to sustain, "*He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*" He is "*sustaining all things by His powerful word,*" Hebrews 1:3 says.

Sometimes God is present to punish. Here's what we need to realize. It's not always a good thing when the Bible says God is going to be with you. If you are apart from Christ in your sin, it is not good for God to be with you, because sometimes He is present to punish. You see this in this passage in Habakkuk 1. This is one of my favorites because I travel to a conference, and they'll have Habakkuk 1:5 as a theme. But it says, "*Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.*" And so it sounds like, "Oh, what a great theme verse." The reality is, though, what He's about to do is raise up a pagan army to bring judgment on His people, and they're about to be obliterated. So it's not a very positive thing. It's not something we want to celebrate at a conference that God is going to bring judgment on us. So we need to realize sometimes God is present to punish.

Most often though, when Scripture talks about the presence of God, it talks about how God is present to bless. Sometimes God is present to bless. There's nowhere we can go, even to the depths of heaven or hell, where God is not present, but He's present to punish and He's present to bless.

This truth is a life-changing doctrine. You think about it. What does this mean? This means number one—God is always accessible. Isn't this good news? It's good news for how we pray, how we worship, why we don't need to go to church, because we are in the presence of God. We don't have to go to a place. And we need to remember this.

Sometimes we are at a place in our lives where God seems to be blessing, things seem to be going well, and then maybe God moves us. Maybe He moves us to another city, moves

us to another home, moves us to another place, and we don't have the same sense of His presence we had back there. It's good to remember that God is just as present here as He was there. He's just as present.

God is always accessible, and therefore you are never alone. Living becomes an awesome business when you realize that you spend every moment of your life in the sight and company of an infinite, omniscient creator. It becomes an awesome business, and it's a great comfort. 2 Timothy 4, I believe it's 4:16 when Paul essentially says, "There was a point in my life when everyone deserted me, but the Lord was with me." Ladies and gentlemen, no matter how lonely it feels, you are never alone. God is omnipresent.

### **The Omniscience of God**

God has all knowledge and all wisdom at all times. I'm going to bring the wisdom of God in here, at this point. Some people separate out the wisdom of God as an attribute. We're going to bring it in here.

We'll start with knowledge. God possesses perfect knowledge. He knows Himself perfectly. He knows all things perfectly. When you're talking about all things, we're talking all things actual. Nothing is hidden from His sight. Everything is uncovered before Him. He knows all things that are, all things that could be, will be, all things possible, all things that could have been, all things that could be now, and all things that could be in the future. He knows all things actual and possible. He knows everything at every moment.

This picture of Him having everything, in a sense, in His consciousness as present. If you were to ask God how many grains of sand there are on the earth, He would not say, "Well let me go check." He would not have to go find out. He would not have to go to some place to look it up. He knows everything at every moment. He knows all things at once.

This means that God never learns. He never learns. He has no need to learn. He never has learned, and He cannot learn. He will not learn. God never discovers. He never wonders about anything. He never comes to us with questions. When we do see Him asking questions, it's for our sake, not for His sake.

God never forgets. You say "What about Isaiah 43:25 that says, *"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remember your sins no more."* We need to realize, that Isaiah 43:25 is not saying that He has no knowledge whatsoever of what you've done in the past, because that would mean that you have knowledge of what you've done in the past and God does not. That wouldn't add up. But the reality is, what He's saying in Isaiah 43:25, is that all these things in the past that He is fully aware of, and has been fully aware of throughout all times, is that He, by the Blood of Christ, no longer holds you accountable for those things. He remembers your sins no more. He no longer counts sin against you.

God never ponders. He never has to think, "Well let me think about what I'm going to do about that one." He never ponders, and God is never surprised or amazed. He's never surprised or amazed by anything that happens. "Oh, that one caught me off guard" never comes into the mind of God. God simply knows. He simply knows all things at all times. This is the humbling, terrifying, glorious truth: God knows us completely. Ladies and gentlemen, there is nothing you can hide from this God, absolutely nothing.

Psalm 139:1-6 reminds us, *"You have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my*

*lying down; you're familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.*" He knows everything about you.

Now let's just think about how comforting this is for followers of Christ, who have trusted in Christ for forgiveness. Listen to what Tozer said, "That God knows each person through and through can be a cause of shaking fear to the man who has something to hide." If you have something to hide in this room tonight from God, then you should be afraid of His omniscience. Tozer goes on,

Some unforsaken sin, some secret crime committed against man or God, but, to us who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope that is set before us in the gospel, how inutterably sweet is the knowledge that our Heavenly Father knows us completely? No tale bearer can inform on us. No enemy can make an accusation stick. No forgotten skeleton can come tumbling out of some hidden closet to abash us and expose our past. No unsuspected weakness in our characters can come to light and turn God away from us since He knew us utterly before we knew Him and called us to Himself in the full knowledge of everything that was against us.

Isn't that good news? There is never going to be anyone who is going to come up and say, "God you know what David did back there? Didn't know about that one." He knew about everything! Everything. That which nobody else in this room, probably including myself, even realizes the depth of, and yet He loves me and He doesn't turn against me. What an incredible truth. That's the knowledge of God.

Now the wisdom of God. What does it mean for God to be wise? Because God is wise, He always accomplishes the best purposes through the best means. Now this is one heavy thought. God always accomplishes the best purposes through the best means. Romans 11:33 tells us, "*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*" This means that you can't improve on God's plans. He always does what is best. This is huge.

Two foundations for trust here: Because God has perfect wisdom, and God has total power. He knows what is best and He has the power to bring about what is best. Now, I think maybe one of the ways we can understand the wisdom of God is by comparing His wisdom with our wisdom.

Think about it with me—the limited wisdom of man. We all know we have limited wisdom. Why do we have limited wisdom? Well, number one, we lack knowledge. Sometimes we act unwisely because we don't have all the knowledge. We think, "Wow, if I'd known that, I'd acted differently in that circumstance. I just didn't know that."

Sometimes we lack perspective. Sometimes we have distorted, or limited perspective. For example, you take a child and you put a nickel in front of him, or a dime, and he's probably going to choose the nickel every time. Why? Because it's bigger. He has no clue it's worth half as much—different perspective.

And we lack experience. We know the more experience we gain, the more we grow in wisdom. So we lack knowledge, perspective, and experience. That's why our wisdom is limited.

Now I want you to think about the unlimited wisdom of God. How is that so? Well, number one—we just talked about it—God has perfect knowledge. God never says, "If I would have

known that, I would have acted differently." He acts, in light of all the facts, all the time. He knows everything. Second, God has eternal perspective. Wisdom is seeing things in focus; seeing things as they relate to the whole picture. He has eternal perspective, and God has infinite experience. And this is how God can encourage us to trust Him in the dark. This is how God can encourage us to trust Him when it doesn't make sense to us.

What is the way of wisdom? Let me encourage you in three ways. Number one, pray with confidence. This is what James said. This is incredible truth. He said, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does"* (Jas. 1:5-8). Did you hear that? This is God saying, "I have all wisdom. You ask it of me, and I promise to give it to you."

This is why we see all throughout Scripture the idea of seeking wisdom. Trust—pray with confidence. Second, cling to the cross. 1 Corinthians 1 is one of the most beautiful pictures of how the cross is the wisdom of God. It ends with Christ being called our wisdom. This picture of the cross that seems like foolishness to some men is the ultimate display of the wisdom of God.

Trust in the Father. This is where it really hits home. This is one of my favorite parts in the Book of Luke, when Jesus is teaching about prayer, and He gets to the end and says, *"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him"* (Luke 11:11-13)! This is the picture. God is Father. This all starts coming together.

God is Father. He is all-wise. Which means He always gives what is best. Go back to Psalm 23, and the experience I was sharing with you. When I got a call, and my brother was on the other line saying, "Something's wrong with Dad. Pray for him." And so I began to pray. For the next hour I prayed, and I prayed, and I began to weep. I began to pray that God would spare my Dad. Then, I get the next call that said it had not happened.

It's in those moments when the wisdom of God is the only rock we have to stand on. In those moments to be able to look to the infinitely wise God, and say, "You are Father, and I'm going to trust that you know what is best. I lack perspective and I lack knowledge. I lack experience. You have all of those things. I'm going to trust that you know what is best." This is a rock solid truth. I'm not saying it's an easy truth. It's not an easy truth, but it's rock solid.

Tozer put it best, "With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, with the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack?" The wisdom of God, omniscience of God—all knowledge, all wisdom, all the time.

### **The Immutability of God**

This means He's unchanging. Four truths. Can God ever change? Here's the answer. Number one, God's perfections are unchanging. And what I mean by His perfections is "His being"—all of His attributes that we have talking about. Who God is never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. *"...You remain the same"*, Hebrews 1:12 says. He *"does not change like shifting shadows"*, James 1:17 says. His perfections never change. Love, mercy, grace, eternity, spirituality, personality—all of these things never change.



Second, God's purposes are unchanging. What God purposes, never changes. "*The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations*" (Ps. 33:10-11). When you get to the end of Isaiah 46:9-11, and God says, "*What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned that will I do.*" God does what He wants, and all that He wants will always be achieved. God's purposes are unchanging, and God's promises are unchanging. His Word stands forever. He doesn't lie. He doesn't change His mind.

Now the question is, what about passages like Exodus 32 when God says, in response to the people constructing this golden calf, "I'm going to wipe these people out. I'm going to destroy them." And then Moses prays, and even pleads for God not to destroy them. And the Bible says, God "relented." Some translations even say "He repented"; He did something different; changed His mind. So the question is, does God change His mind, or not?

This is where I'm going to bring you this fourth truth. God's perfections, purposes and His promises are unchanging. Those are all true in Scripture. The fourth truth is, God's plan is unfolding. Here's what I mean by that. In Exodus 32 we see His plan unfolding. What you are seeing is God saying, "Because of my people's sin, they deserve my destruction." At the same time, in God's plan, His purpose is to raise up Moses to be a mediator who will pray on their behalf, and for God to say, "I will not destroy them because you have prayed for them."

This is a picture of the cross. This is a picture of God saying, "In your sin, you deserve wrath. In my plan, I'm raising up Christ to take my wrath upon Himself on your behalf, so that you can be forgiven of your sins and have new life." His plan is unfolding. That does not mean that His perfections, and His purposes are changing.

That leads us to these four conclusions: Number one, God does not change in His reign over us. That's just basically restating the fact that His perfections, promises, purposes are unchanging. This is a good thing. It's a good thing that God doesn't change in His love. If he ever did, it would mean He would either have to change for the better or for the worse. If He'd change for the better, that would mean He wasn't perfectly loving in the first place. If He were to change for the worse, then that would certainly be a bad thing.

How could we take the promise of the Scripture that say, "Trust in me and you'll have eternal life"? If His promises were changing, then all we could say is, "Well maybe, hopefully that will happen, as long as God doesn't change His mind." No. His promises are unchanging. He does not change in His reign over us.

God does change in His relationship to us. There was a day, in my own life, when I was under the wrath of God in sin. By the Word of Christ, the power of Christ, and His Spirit drawing me to salvation, He changed in His relationship to me. So now I need never fear His wrath again, because I'm under His mercy and His grace. Be thankful that God changes in His relationship to us! He does not change in His reign over us, but He does change His relationship to us. We can see that happening in the unfolding plan of God.

Take that a step deeper. Look at the book of Jonah. God said, "I'm going to destroy the Ninevites unless they repent." But then He raises up Jonah to go to them. Jonah goes to them, he preaches, and they repent. It's the whole picture that leads to this third conclusion—God involves us in His plan.

God's raising up people to pray. He's raising up people to proclaim the gospel. So God involves us in His plan, and God uses us to accomplish His purposes. God ordains the end, but He also ordains the means to that end. It's the immutability of God. He involves us in His plan and uses us.

### **The Greatness of God**

You bring all these seven attributes together and we pray God, deliver us from feeble faith. How can we have feeble faith when this is the God we worship and serve? And God delivered us from unfit worship. Tozer said, "In my opinion, the great single need of the moment is that light-hearted superficial religionists be struck down with a vision of God high and lifted up, with his train filling the temple. The holy art of worship seems to have passed away like the Shekinah glory from the tabernacle. As a result, we are left to our own devices and forced to make up the lack of spontaneous worship by bringing in countless cheap and tawdry activities to hold the attention of the church people."

I want to remind you, ladies and gentlemen, the greatness of God is more than enough to hold the attention of church people today. We don't need to bring in "cheap and tawdry activity" into our worship to entertain. We have a great God. When we see this great God, we will worship. His greatness elicits great worship!

## **The Attributes of God ~ Goodness**

### **The Goodness of God**

- Holiness
- Integrity
- Love
- Mercy
- Grace
- Justice
- Wrath
- Jealousy

### **The Holiness of God**

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory"* (Is. 6:3). This is the only attribute of God that's mentioned three times in a row in a succession like that. It's like Scripture is putting a bold, or italics, or underline on God's holiness. The Bible never says that God is love, love, love; or wrath, wrath, wrath; or justice, justice, justice. This doesn't mean that His Holiness is more important than all the other attributes, but it does mean we need to pay attention to the holiness of God. What does that mean?

When Scripture says in succession, "holy, holy, holy," we see, number one, that it means that God is perfectly unique. He is different. He is unique from us. There's nothing like Him. "To whom then will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" God says in Isaiah 40.

Second, He is completely separate. He is separate from us. Unique from us, separate from us, and then third, God is absolutely pure. We are all sinners, whereas God stands over and against us, not only as one who is unique and separate from us, but He is ethically and morally pure. He is untouched by sin. His eyes are too pure to look on evil. He cannot tolerate wrong. "*When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me'*" (Jas. 1:13). He's

untouched by sin, and He is intolerable of sin. Hebrews 12:14 tell us, "*without holiness no one will see the Lord,*" because He does not tolerate sin, and is untouched by sin.

How does God reveal His holiness? You see it happening in so many ways throughout Scripture. God reveals His holiness through people. He disciplines His people so that they may share in His holiness. He reveals His holiness through places. Exodus 3:5, and Joshua 5:15, are both times when God says, "*Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.*" It's holy because God is there in His Holiness. The picture is God showing His holiness through the Law. Leviticus 11:45 is when God says, "*...be holy, because I am holy.*" "Here's my law. It displays my holiness. You follow this, and you'll reflect my holiness."

He displays His holiness through the Prophets, as well as through His judgment. This is the picture in Joshua 7 with Achan's sin. Achan commits a sin and jeopardizes the blessing of the presence of God on the entire of people of God. Or Acts 5—remember what happened there? It is the beginning of the early church, and Ananias comes in first, he deceives, and falls over dead. Sapphira comes in next, she deceives, and she falls over dead. And it says in Acts 5:11 "*Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*" God is more interested in the sanctity of His people than He is the size of your church. God is very serious about showing His holiness through His judgment.

He shows His holiness through His Son, Jesus, who is without sin. And He shows His holiness through His church. We are intended to be a demonstration of the holiness of God in the communities where we live. This is why we must not be lazy when it comes to holiness. People will see the holiness of God in us.

### **The Integrity of God**

Think about the integrity of God. It sounds kind of interesting. You might be thinking, "Well what do you mean?" Think about it in three ways. First of all, God's genuineness, meaning God is true. In a world of artificiality, God is real. He's not fabricated. He's not constructed like you see in this picture in Jeremiah, when it's talking about worthless wooden idols that are fabricated. We live in a society where all truth is viewed as relative; as a matter of opinion; as subjective to this or that. God is true.

God's voracity. Not only is He true, but God always tells the truth. God always represents things the way they really are. What God says is always accurate. He does not lie, or change His mind. Every word of God is flawless. So you have His genuineness—He is true, His voracity—He tells the truth. Third, you have God's faithfulness—He always proves true. He always keeps His promises. God always fulfills what He says He'll do.

The implications of God's integrity. God is the final standard of truth. All truth is God's truth. And this should encourage us in the many endeavors, even in all the different areas one can study in college. It comes back to the fact that God is true, and it's true because God has made it true. Because God is true, His Word is trustworthy.

We are imitators of God's integrity. We must love truth. We must hate falsehood. We must not lie—not just because it's wrong, but because it does not reflect the truth of our God. It does not reflect the character of our God, and that's why He says it so strongly in the Ten Commandments. "*The Lord detest lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful,*" it says in Proverbs 12:22.

## **The Love of God**

God is love. This is one of those doctrines that can be so manipulated, abused, and perverted. There's a great book called *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, by D.A. Carson. What does it mean for God to be love? It means that God eternally gives and shares Himself.

Now, let's put all this together. God's love exists in Himself. You have two passages in your study guide, but it's all over Scripture. God didn't create us because He was lonely. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit have communion with each other. There was love, and a relationship that existed in Himself. God doesn't need us in order for love to be possible.

Second, God's love initiates with Himself. Some people say things like, "What did God see in me that He would save me from my sins?" God saw absolutely nothing in you. Nothing. "*The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples*" (Deut. 7:7). God did this. You also see this in Romans 5, "*...when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners,*" when we were all, every single one of us, completely undeserving of His love, "*Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:6-8).

God's love centers on Himself. Isaiah 43, one of the most beautiful passages, says, "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze...I am the Lord, your God, you are precious and honored in my sight, and I love you*" (Is. 43:1-4). It's an incredible passage. You get to 43:7, and you have God basically saying, "I created you for my glory. Loved you for my glory."

The demonstration of God's love. How do we know God loves us? Number one, He pursues His people. I love that John Bunyan talks about how God is the "hound of heaven." Luke 15, you see the father running after the prodigal son. Exodus 33, God speaking face to face with Moses as a man speaks with his friend.

He provides for His people. John 3:16—"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son."

He protects His people. I love Zephaniah 3:17, and I would encourage you to hide this Scripture in your heart. The Lord quiets you with His love and He rejoices over you with singing. What a picture. Just let that imagery soak in.

He persists after His people. He is slow to anger. He has unlimited patience 1 Timothy 1 says. His patience is His goodness toward those who continue to sin over, and over. Anyone thankful for second chances, third chances, fourth, fifth, sixth? I'm thankful that God persists after His people.

So what is the effect of God's love? Number one, we express love to God. Just let that soak in—the idea in 1 John 4:19 that we love, because He first loved us. We have the privilege of loving God. First and greatest commandment: "*love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*" (Matt. 22:37). We love God.

Second, we extend love to others. The second commandment is: "*love your neighbor as yourself*" (Matt. 22:39). "*Love each other as I have loved you*" (John 15:12). The reality is

that God's love is always evident in His people. Always evident. 1 John 4:19-21 makes it clear that if we do not love, then God is not in us. If there is no love, then there is no God there. That's the picture that 1 John 2, and 1 John 4 are giving us.

### **The Mercy/Grace of God**

I'm going to combine these together, and talk about how mercy is His love applied specifically in our suffering and His grace is His love applied specifically in our sins.

We'll start with mercy. The mercy of God is the love of God applied to our suffering. When you think about the mercy of God, we're thinking about tender compassion toward the needy. Compassion toward those who are "*harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,*" to blind men who are calling out "Have mercy on me" (Matt. 9:36; 27). Strong comfort for the suffering. He is the "*God of all comfort who comforts us in our troubles*" (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

Deep concern for the hurting. When we're hurting, God's mercy means He has concern for us. He has compassion on us. It's the picture in Exodus 3:7, when He basically said, "I have seen the misery my people suffering in Egypt and I'm showing them mercy." When we are suffering, God is merciful.

Then you get to the grace—the grace of God is God's love applied to our sin. The picture here is God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment. He's the God of all grace who took us as objects of His wrath, brought us from death to life, and saved us by grace through faith, not from ourselves, for it was the gift of God (Eph. 2:1-10). People have taken this acronym for God's **GRACE**, and said—

- God's
- Riches
- At
- Christ's
- Expense

I want to remind you, grace involves no merit in us. There's nothing in us that elicits grace. If there was, it wouldn't be grace.

Second, no compensation from us. You say, "What do you mean by that?" I mean you don't pay God back for His grace to you. As soon as you say "Look at all Jesus did for me, now I'm going to do this for Him to pay Him back for the debt I could never repay," you undercut grace. It is grace because it can't be paid back.

Grace is the source of our salvation, and grace is the motive behind our salvation. It's why we are saved, because of the grace of God. Grace is the guarantee of our salvation. Romans 4:16 says, "*...The promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring.*" The reason our salvation can be guaranteed is because of grace.

The grace and mercy of God are, number one, eternal. The grace of God for His children, the mercy of God towards His children, will never end. Second, the grace and mercy of God are free. We're "*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 3:23-24). Third, they are sovereign. What I mean by that is in Exodus 33:19 "*And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I*

*will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”* Grace and mercy rest in the prerogative of God, and no one else. His grace and mercy are free, eternal, and sovereign.

### **The Justice of God**

Now you take love, mercy, and grace, couple that with these next three attributes—justice, wrath, and jealousy. The justice of God means that God administers His kingdom in accordance with His law. What the Bible teaches is that He is always fair. He does not show favoritism. People say—when you look at that picture of Sovereign grace, of God saying, “I’ll have mercy on whom I have mercy, and compassion on whom I have compassion”—“Well that’s not fair.” We want to talk about fairness? You don’t want to talk about fairness before this God without grace and mercy in the picture.

Fairness before this God involves condemnation for sin. It’s what we all deserve, and warrant because of our sin. God is always fair. The question is how can He show grace and mercy to us? That’s what we’re about to get to. But He is always right. “*Upright and just is He; all His ways are just,*” Deuteronomy 32:4 tells us.

Now what does that mean? The judgment of God is first of all, authoritative. In order for a judge to be a judge, to show and administer justice, that judge has to have authority. He has to have the power to execute a judicial sentence.

Second, the judgment of God is eternal. I would encourage you go back and read that Psalm 73. It’s a great psalm. It’s what Solomon was wrestling with. Basically you see Solomon saying, “I see the wicked prospering all around me. I can’t understand how God can be just, and still all the wicked are prospering around me.” He gets to the end of the psalm, and he says these words, “*When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny*” (Ps. 73:16-17). The picture of judgment being eternal is a bedrock truth, because it reminds us that all injustice, and all evil that we see in the world will one day have its end. Evil will not reign in the end. The good will reign in the end, because God is just. This is a bedrock truth.

The judgment of God is irreversible. I want you to listen to these words, very closely with me. Revelation 20:11-15,

*I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Ladies and gentlemen, you do not want to go one-on-one with this God, not without Christ you don’t. If you have not believed in this God, trusted in this God as Savior, if there is any inkling in you that would believe that maybe God is the Judge that He says He is, then I encourage you to throw aside everything in your life and find out if He is. This is far too important to not deal with. His judgment is eternal and it is irreversible.

Justice and other attributes—you put all this together and you see the beauty here. Love without justice is mere sentimentality. I love, but I don't care about that which is right or wrong. That is emotionalism. It's sentimentality. A just love is far superior to an unjust love.

You think about omnipotence. Omnipotence without justice is plain brutality. What if God was all powerful, but He wasn't just?! You would have unrighteousness running rampant in all creation!

But, love, justice and omnipotence together are a glorious reality. The beauty is, that love, justice, and omnipotence do not conflict, but come together in beautiful unity.

The Bible teaches that we are recipients of His justice, meaning God will be just toward us. This is the beauty of what happened at the cross according to Romans 3. God sent Jesus to the cross so that He would be presented "*as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood...to demonstrate His justice...so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus*" (Rom. 3:25-26). At the cross, God shows Himself to be just. God does punish sin. That is what the cross is about. But not only just, at the cross, God shows Himself to be justifier. He justifies those who have faith in Jesus. He makes right those who trust in Him, based on the cross.

We are imitators of His justice. I have a couple scriptures listed in your study guide from the Minor Prophets. When you look throughout the Minor Prophets, in particular, you will see the justice of God emphasized. God is very serious about His justice being demonstrated in His people. His people live for social justice—for justice in the culture that we live in.

### **The Wrath of God**

What does it mean? This attribute of God we don't think about much. What does it mean for Him to be wrathful? Well, number one, it means that God intensely hates all sin. "*You...hate wickedness,*" Psalm 45:7 says. "*You cannot tolerate wrong,*" Habakkuk 1:13. He intensely hates all sin.

Second, His wrath means that God intensely hates all sinners. You're thinking, "Whatever happened to God hates the sin but loves the sinner?" Well the Bible happened to that. Psalm 5:5 says, "*The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong.*" Ephesians 2:1-3 says we are objects of His wrath. Our clichés cannot stand in light of the Word of God. If we minimize this, then we minimize what's happening at the cross.

I'm a father of two boys. Anything that would pull them away from that which is best for them, I would hate. It is good for a father to hate anything that pulls his children away from that which is best for them. You see how His love, and His wrath most certainly go together?

Why does He hate sin? Because it pulls us away from the intimate satisfaction that is found in Him. It is a good thing that God has wrath, and intensely hates all sin. Just think with me about wrath and other attributes. A picture of love without wrath is indifferent. This would be like saying, "I love my kids but I don't care if somebody pulls them away in a negative way." No, that's not love.

Justice without wrath is ineffective. This would be like saying, "I am just towards that which is wrong, but I have no authority to carry out sentence upon it." But love, justice and wrath together are indescribable, yet tell us so much about the goodness of God, and it is core to the gospel.

I want you to think about how the gospel brings all this together. The reality of the gospel is, number one, we deserve the wrath of God because we are sinners. God intensely hates all sin, all and sinners. God loves all that is good, holy, and right. He hates all that which is opposite of good, holy, and right. Ladies and gentlemen, you are the opposite. I am the opposite. The beauty of it, though, is at the cross Jesus satisfied the wrath of God.

This is the picture of Jesus in the garden cowering, sweating blood. Why? Was it because He was afraid of a Roman cross, and Roman nails? No. Absolutely not. Was He afraid of what was about to happen with the crown of thorns that was to be put on His head? No. There were people in that first century after Him, who went to crosses, and were not just nailed there, but were burned there. And they went there singing; they went there joyously. Did they have more courage than Christ? Absolutely not. Why was He cowering? Why was He sweating blood in such agony in the garden?

Listen to what He says, "Father let this cup pass for me." From Isaiah to Revelation, the "cup" is filled with the wine of God's wrath. The cup is filled with the fury of God's wrath. That's the picture.

It's not just a picture of Jesus being put on a wooden cross, and having a spear thrust into His side, and all the other things we often almost glamorize. The picture is in that holy moment, all the wrath of a holy God poured out on His Son. All the wrath, and righteous anger of God towards sin—your sin, my sin—poured out on His Son in that moment.

One preacher described it as you, or I, standing 100 yards in front of a dam 10,000 miles high, and 10,000 miles wide filled to the brim with water. In one instant, the wall of that dam is stripped away, and that water comes flooding right towards you. And the moment before it hits your feet, the ground in front of you opens up and swallows up every single bit of it.

Jesus, on that cross, took the cup of God's wrath, drank down every single drop, and when He finished the last drop, He turned the cup over and said, "It is finished!" And Jesus satisfied the wrath of God, due your sin and my sin. This is the gospel. We cannot minimize this by minimizing sin.

We deserve the wrath of God. Jesus satisfied the wrath of God, and we are saved from the wrath of God. "*For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life*" (Rom. 5:10).

God's wrath is a motivation for our purity. If God hates sin, how can we be casual with sin? How is that possible? It's not possible. God's wrath is also the motivation for our evangelism. I think of Romans 9, when Paul basically says, "I would give up my salvation for the sake of my brethren, the people of Israel." If this gospel is true, if we really believe the gospel, then how can we not go to 600 million Hindus and Muslims in Northern India to take the gospel to them?! If they are truly headed to an eternity separated from the blessing-presence of God, and therefore separated from the love and mercy of God, and would be under the wrath of God, then how can we live our lives here like it doesn't matter what's going on over there?! We've got to do "church" here, for the sake of what God is doing in the nations. Because His wrath is real, and His grace is good!

We know this, and if we know this, we must live—abandon—our lives to make this gospel known among the nations! If we're not, then we don't know this gospel!



God's wrath is the motivation for our worship. As unbelievers, we should fear God and His wrath. As believers, we should exalt God in His wrath.

### **The Jealousy of God**

Now what does this mean? We obviously know that jealousy can have a negative connotation. Can it have a positive connotation? Yes, it absolutely can. The Jealousy of God means that God is deeply committed to His Glory.

Exodus 25 is listed in your study guide. All the Mosaic references to God's jealousy have to do with idol worship in some way. We don't think about jealousy as a desirable attribute. We have talked about the fact that God exalts Himself. God is right to exalt Himself, because He's God. It just makes sense.

He is supremely secure, and He is supremely satisfying. This is important because of the negative connotation of jealousy we often times have. Say you have a high school guy, who is dating a girl, or wanting to date a girl. And he gets jealous, because she starts hanging out with another guy. Well why is he jealous? He is insecure, because he thinks this guy is going to show him up, because he thinks, "Well this guy is going to make her happier than I could," so he gets jealous about that.

That's not the picture of God in His jealousy. God is supremely secure. He is supremely satisfying. He is not worried that you are going to find someone, or something, that is better than Him. He knows there is nothing better than Him.

So as a result, He is jealous for our affections. Which means the second thing: God is deeply committed to our good. This is a great thing! In my relationship with my wife, it's a good thing that I am jealous for my wife's affection. Because of my jealousy for her affection, that means that any attempt to draw her affections away from me by anyone, will be met with the strongest of force.

I want you to think about it. It's good to know that any effort of the adversary to pull us away from the goodness of God will be met with the strongest of force from our God. He is deeply committed to our good.

His jealousy brings great comfort because He will protect us. He will protect us from that which would pull us away from Him. His jealousy brings great hope that He will keep us. He will keep us close to Himself. His jealousy breeds great worship: He will allure us to Himself. Much like in the picture in Hosea 2. Because He is supremely secure and supremely satisfying, He allures us to Himself.

What does this mean for us? This sums up all these attributes—because God is jealous we must be zealous for His glory. You can't sit back in passive Christianity when you are following a God who is jealous for His glory.

We must be zealous for our good. You might think, "What do you mean? You mean we should desire good?" Yes, because we find all goodness and satisfaction in God. I put in your study guide, Revelation 3:14-21. Think about when He basically says, "Because you are neither hot nor cold, you're lukewarm, I'll spew you out of my mouth." The picture here is God saying to His people, "I will spew you out of my mouth, because you lack the zeal." God is very concerned about His people being zealous for His glory and our good. We talked about them going together.

If these 14 attributes of God are real, and true, then how can we be apathetic in the Church? It is impossible! The only reason we can be apathetic is if we do not know this God.

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