

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

By

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“The Solitariness of God”

Exodus 15:11, Micah 7:18-20

Author Pink’s excellent book, *Gleanings In The Godhead*, begins with a chapter titled *The Solitariness of God*. I cannot think of a better way to begin a study of the attributes of God than by contemplating the solitariness of our great and glorious God. So in this first study I want to show you from the Scriptures something of that which separates and distinguishes God from all his creatures: his solitariness. Two passages which clearly demonstrate this are Exodus 15:11 and Micah 7:18-20. Read them both carefully.

Everyone knows that God is great in wisdom, wondrous in power, and abundant in mercy. But in these degenerate days of religious perversion, most people know nothing of God’s Being, his nature, and his attributes. There are very few who understand that God is infinite, majestic, great beyond imagination, and glorious. I hope that this study and the ones to follow will be blessed of God to inspire you to trust, adore, and reverently worship him. I will begin by showing that God is solitary in his excellence and glory. There is no one and nothing in all the universe like our God. He is infinitely higher and greater than all his creation. It is the solitary excellence of God that inspires reverence for him, faith in him, and obedience to him. Yet, at the outset, it must be acknowledged that our God is incomprehensibly great. As Isaac Watts teaches in the verses below, no mortal can fully know him.

“Can creatures to perfection find The eternal, uncreated
mind?

Or can the largest stretch of thought Measure and search his
nature out?

'Tis high as heaven, 'tis deep as hell; And what can mortals know or tell?
His glory spreads beyond the sky, And all the shining worlds on high."

Here are six facts about God which show his solitariness, six things which distinguish him from and set him apart from all his creatures, infinitely.

1. There is one God.

The Word of God universally and with the utmost clarity states that there is only one God (Deut. 6:4; I Cor. 8:6; I Tim. 2:5; Eph. 4:4-6). God alone is solitary in his Being. There are many angels, many men, and many of all other creatures; but God is One. He "*only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see; to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen*" (I Timothy 6:16). Because there is one God our allegiance is due to him alone. Our affections are to be directed to him alone. And all who know, trust, and worship him are one body.

2. God is eternal.

Angels are not eternal. Men are not eternal. And matter is not eternal. But God is eternal. In Genesis 1:1 we read, "*In the beginning God.*" In the beginning there was nothing and no one but God. There was a "time" before time began, when God dwelt alone in the ineffable glory of his own great Being. There was no heaven in which to set his throne and manifest his glory. There was no earth to be his footstool which engaged his care. There were no angels to sing his praise. There was no universe to be upheld by the word of his power. There were no men created in his image and after his likeness. There were no hours, days, months, years, or ages. From everlasting, in old eternity, God was alone in his glory.

He is the great "I Am," "the eternal God," who says, "*I live forever!*" The psalmist says of him, "*Thy throne is established of old; thou art from everlasting*" (Psa. 93:2). He is the first and the last, "*the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity*" (Isa. 57:15). This great God, who alone is eternal, is and must be the Creator of all things, the Possessor of all things, the Ruler of all things, and the Disposer of all things.

3. God is Spirit.

Our Lord Jesus Christ declares, "*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24). That does not mean that God is one spirit among many, but that he is Spirit, without the limitations of a body. The Bible often ascribes to God terms such as "*the hand of the Lord,*" "*the mouth of the Lord,*" "*the eyes of the Lord, the arm of the Lord,*" and "*the ear of the Lord.*" But these terms are mere accommodations of language to help our puny brains understand the works of God. They are anthropomorphic terms, human terms to describe the works of the Lord. They do not, in any way, represent the nature and being of God.

As you read the Bible you cannot fail to notice that never once were men given any kind of physical, visible, tangible representation of God's Being. Even under the types and shadows of the Old Testament age of ceremonial worship, nothing was given as a representation of God's Being. All the types and shadows of the law represented his work of redemption through Christ. But nothing represented God himself. Why? Because God is Spirit. He is the infinite, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, omnipresent Spirit.

Because God is Spirit, he expressly forbids every form of idolatry (Ex. 20:3-6). The first and second commandments forbid the acceptance of any other god or any intrusion of anyone or anything in our hearts in the place of God as the object of our

affections or the ruler of our lives. These two commands also forbid the worship of God through the use of any image, the representation of God by anything visible, and the use of religious images, symbols or pictures (Pictures of Christ, crosses, crucifixes, religious relics, angelic forms, etc.). Do not look upon this as an extreme position. Those who make use of such religious symbols and emblems, who would be shocked to be charged with the practice of idolatry, only need to read II Kings 18:1-7 to see how serious this breach of God's law is.

All true worship and service rendered to God must be spiritual, heart worship. It is not sufficient to come before God on bended knee, with prostrate body, or with words of praise. We must worship God in and by his Holy Spirit and with our spiritual nature, our souls, our hearts, our minds, and our wills True worship is heart worship (John 4:23-24; Phil. 3:3). We must worship God alone. We must worship him spiritually. We must worship God sincerely. And we must worship him in truth, in accordance with revealed truth. The doctrines of Scripture and the outward duties of public and private worship must never be neglected or altered (I Chron. 15:13); but the essence of worship must be found in the heart. Otherwise the outward acts of worship are an abomination to the Lord God (Isa. 1:10-15).

4. God is a trinity.

We worship one God in the trinity or tri-unity, of his sacred persons. We do not have three Gods. We worship one God, who subsists in three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And these three persons are equal in all things. This is precisely what is stated in 1 John 5:7. *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."*

From the very beginning God revealed that there are three persons in the Godhead. God the Father created all things through

his Son, the Word (Gen. 1:1, John 1:1-3). God the Spirit moved upon the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2). God said, *“Let us make man in our image and in our likeness”* (Gen. 1:26). And God promised to send his Son, the Seed of the woman, to redeem fallen man (Gen. 3:15).

In the New Testament the doctrine of the Trinity is, as we have seen, expressly declared in 1 John 5:7; and it is frequently represented to us. When our Lord was baptized the Father spoke from heaven, the Son was immersed in the Jordan river, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him from heaven (Matt. 3:16-17). God’s servants are commanded to administer the ordinance of baptism in the name of the Trinity. *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”* (Matt. 28:19). The apostolic benediction (II Cor. 13:14) pronounces the blessings of grace upon God’s saints in the name of the triune God. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself plainly declares the trinity of persons in the Godhead (John 14:16). And all three persons in the Trinity are involved in the work of salvation. The salvation of God’s elect was planned by God the Father, purchased by God the Son, and applied by God the Spirit (Eph. 1:3-14). The Word of God reveals one God in three persons. The Father is God (Rom. 1:7). The Son is God (Heb. 1:8). And the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4). *“And these three are One.”*¹

5. God is independent and self-sufficient.

God is solitary in his Being, in his eternality, in his spirituality, and in his trinity. And God is solitary in his independence and self-

¹ Though the Son is voluntarily subject to the Father (John 10:16-18), and the Spirit is voluntarily subject to the Son and the Father (John 14:16) in the covenant of redemption and grace, for the salvation of God’s elect, there is no subordination of Persons in the Godhead.

sufficiency. God alone needs nothing. God does not need you, me, or anyone else. God needs nothing but himself. In old eternity, when God dwelt alone in the glory of his triune persons, he was self-contained and self-sufficient, in need of nothing. He needed nothing to make him happy, glorious, and complete. And he is still independent, self-sufficient, in need of nothing. The creation of the world added nothing to God. He is immutable. He changes not (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). His essential glory could never be increased or diminished.

God was under no constraint, obligation, or necessity to create the world. God who *“worketh all things after the counsel of his own will”* (Eph. 1:11), freely chose to create the world simply because it was his sovereign pleasure to do so. He created the world, not to get glory to himself, but to display and manifest his glory in it. God gains nothing from his creatures. Even the praises of redeemed sinners add nothing to the glory of his Being. Read Nehemiah 9:5. *“Stand up and bless the Lord, your God, forever and ever; and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.”* Even the salvation of God’s elect adds nothing to his solitary, self-sufficient glory. He predestinated his elect to eternal salvation to the praise of the glory of his grace, *“according to the good pleasure of his will”* (Eph. 1:5). He chose to save us, to show forth his glory in us (Eph. 2:7), but not that he might increase his glory (Psa. 16:2-3). We add nothing to him.

I have often heard it said, “Because God is love there was a great vacuum in God’s heart. He needed someone to love. Therefore he created man.” That was not the case at all. *“God is love.”* But there was from eternity a perfect self-sufficiency even in his love. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwelt together in perfect love from everlasting. We gain everything from God; but God gains nothing from his creatures (Rom. 11:34-36). And if God gains nothing from man, then it is impossible for man to bring God into any obligation to him (Read Job 35:7-8). Every mercy, every

blessing, every benefit we receive from the Almighty is a matter of his own free favor.

By the same token, God loses nothing by the wickedness of his creatures (Job 35:6). As man can add nothing to God's glory, so man can never diminish God's glory. God made all things to show forth his glory, and all things shall serve their end (Rev. 4:11). The glory of his wisdom and power shall be seen in all creation and providence. The glory of his love and justice is seen in redemption. The glory of his mercy and grace is seen in the salvation of his elect. The glory of his truth and righteousness is seen in the eternal ruin of his enemies.

The God of the Bible is so great that he is self-sufficient in the glory of his own holy Being. There was no vacuum in God's heart that had to be filled by man. Had it pleased him to do so, he might have dwelt alone in his solitary glory forever without making his glory known to any. All that we experience of his grace and goodness we experience because of his sovereign good pleasure alone (Psa. 115:3; 135:6).

God is totally independent of his creatures and self-sufficient without us (Isa. 40:15-23; I Tim. 6:15-16). This is the God of the Bible. He is still, in this reprobate religious age, "*the unknown God*" (Acts 17:23). Because he is unknown in this religious world, we seek to make him known. This is a God to be revered, worshipped, and adored. "He is solitary in his majesty, unique in his excellency, peerless in his perfections. He sustains all, but is himself independent of all. He gives to all, and is enriched by none" (A. W. Pink).

6. This great, solitary God can only be known by revelation.

I have offered no arguments to prove the existence of God. That is not because arguments cannot be produced. God's being is a self-evident truth of creation and providence, so that all men and

women are without excuse before him (Rom. 1:20). But no man will ever come to know the living God by the light of nature (Job 11:7-8; 26:14). A savage might find a watch in the sand and conclude that there was a watchmaker; but he would never be able to know the watchmaker by looking at the watch. Even so, a man may know that there is a God by the light of nature; but he can never come to know God by the light of nature.

God cannot be known by man, except as God is pleased to reveal himself to us (John 3:3; I Cor. 2:14). But God has been pleased to reveal himself to men. God has revealed himself to men in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, his dear Son (John 1:18; Heb. 1:1-3). God has revealed himself to men in the inspired volume of Holy Scripture (II Tim. 3:15-17). God reveals himself to men through the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). Yet, no sinner will ever see and know the living God until he reveals himself in the sinner's heart by the irresistible grace and power of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 4:6). Everything depends upon God! Even when we have been made to see and know the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, our spiritual knowledge, at best, is a fragmentary knowledge. We ever need to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing him, let us each seek grace that we *"might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God"* (Col. 1:10).

The Immutability of God

Malachi 3:6

The Apostle James describes our God as “The Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). God himself declares, “I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

How great that God must be who is unchanging and unchangeable! Nothing reaches God. Nothing touches God. Nothing affects God. Nothing moves God. Nothing changes God. God reaches all things; but nothing reaches him. God touches all things; but nothing touches him. God affects all things; but nothing affects him. God moves all things; but nothing moves him. God changes all things; but nothing changes him. God is immutable. Sitting upon his high and glorious throne, with the ease and serenity of total and absolute sovereignty, God looks down upon the heavens, down upon the angels, down upon the earth, down upon men, the worms of the earth, down upon hell, the fallen angels, and satan himself, and declares, *“I am the LORD, I change not!”*

Satan led a revolt against his throne; but God changes not. Sin entered into the world; but God changes not. Nations rise and nations fall; but God changes not. The heavens and the earth shall vanish away; but God changes not. A new heaven and a new earth shall be made; but God changes not. God’s elect shall enter into the bliss of eternal glory, and the damned shall be cast into hell forever; but God changes not. God alone is unaffected. God alone is immutable. God alone never changes.

Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day,
Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away;

Change and decay all around me I see - O thou who changest not,
abide with me.

Immutability belongs to God alone. This world is not immutable. You and I are not immutable. *“Man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity.”* “God alone is, in and of himself, immutable” (John Gill).

GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN THE ESSENCE OF HIS BEING.

God is the eternal, infinite Spirit. He cannot change or be changed by anything. He who says, *“I AM THAT I AM”* (Ex. 3:15), can never experience change. He is immutable. I realize that it is far easier for a man to say what God is not than it is for him to say what God is. But, of this you may be certain, whatever God is in the essence of his Being, he cannot change (Psa. 102:25-27). He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Eternality will not permit change.

That which is eternal must of necessity be. And that which necessarily exists from eternity can never be changed. God is eternal. He is the only Being who is without cause. He is, because he is. Therefore, he cannot change or be changed.

Perfection will not permit change.

Perfection cannot be increased or diminished. God who is perfect cannot change for the better, because he is perfect already. He cannot change for the worse, for that would make him imperfect. Though God created the world, he never changed. It was his will to create from eternity. Creative power was in him from eternity. And the creation of the world has had no effect upon him. When the deed was done, God remained the same. God underwent no change even when the Godhead was united to manhood in the incarnation of Christ (Isa. 9:6). When the Son of God assumed our nature God did not become a man and man did not become God. Godhead and manhood were united in one glorious Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, for the salvation of God’s elect. Be sure you understand this. Our faith is in, and we who believe on the Lord

Jesus Christ have committed our souls to, the holy Lord God who is perpetually the same. He is immutable in the essence of his Being.

GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN THE PERFECTIONS OF HIS NATURE. We are studying the attributes of God, those perfections of the Divine character which are essential to his Being as God. In all the attributes of his nature God is immutable. The **power** of God is immutable. It is never exhausted, or even slightly diminished. The **knowledge** of God is immutable. God has never learned anything. And he has never forgotten anything. We rejoice to hear him say, *“Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”* But that is a revelation of his grace, not a description of his omniscience. And that non-remembrance of his people’s sins was an act of eternal grace. The **goodness** of God is immutable. God’s goodness extends to all his creatures. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. But God’s goodness is never in short supply. It is immutably abundant. The **faithfulness** of God is immutable. His faithfulness never fails! Though we believe not, *“He abideth faithful.”* God is ever faithful in all things to his people, to his purposes, to his promises, to himself, and to his Son. The glorious **holiness** of God is immutable. God’s holiness is never tarnished. He is the immutably just and righteous one. His holiness is always illustriously the same. Satan has not tarnished it. Man has not tarnished it. Grace has not tarnished it. In the forgiveness of sin God remains perfectly just and holy. Through the sacrifice of Christ he is able to be both just and the Justifier of all who believe the gospel (Rom. 3:24-26). His holiness is not tarnished in the forgiveness of sins because his justice has been satisfied by the blood of his own dear Son.

GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN HIS PURPOSES AND DECREES. “There is a purpose for everything, and a time for that purpose. God has determined all that ever was, is, or shall be” (John Gill). All that comes to pass comes to pass according to the counsel and decree of God. And his counsel, his purpose, his decree is immutable (Heb. 6:17; Eph. 1:11; Rom. 11:36; Prov. 16:4). The purposes of

God are always executed. They are never frustrated. It does not lie within the realm of created power to frustrate the purpose of the Creator. *"The counsel of the Lord stands forever"* (Psa. 33:11; Prov. 19:21; Isa. 14:24, 27; 46:10). **God's purposes are in himself** (Eph. 1:9). That which God has purposed in himself cannot change until he changes. And he cannot change until he ceases to be God. And that cannot be. **God's purposes and decrees are eternal** ((Eph. 3:11; Rom. 8:28-30). No new thoughts arise in his mind. No new resolutions are formed in his heart. No new decrees come forth from his lips. His counsels are of old, from everlasting.²

Foolish men imagine that because God appears in their eyes to change that he actually has changed. A moment's thought should prevent anyone from such a low view of the Almighty. Nothing unforeseen can ever arise to make him change his mind. He is able to perform what he has purposed. Changes in providence do not imply any change in God (Job 23:10-14). God's immutability is not inconsistent with the prayers of his people. When he answers prayer in such a way that a change in his purpose appears to have occurred (As in the case of Hezekiah), knowing that prayer will never change God's purpose (Jer. 15:1), we realize that our prayers also were ordained of him for the accomplishment of his purpose. Prayer is one instrument by which God accomplishes his purpose (Ezek. 36:36-37; II Sam. 7:25-27).

GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN HIS LOVE TOWARD HIS ELECT (Jer. 31:3; John 13:1). God's love is like himself. It is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. *"God is love."* And God's love for his elect is without beginning, without cause, without limitation, without change, and without end. Though God's elect fell in Adam, his love never changed. Though we lived long in sin, God's love never changed (Ezek. 16:6-8; Eph. 2:4-5; Tit. 3:3-5). Though we often sin against him, God's love never changes. He hides his face

² **Note:** God's purposes and decrees are called his counsel because they are wisely and deliberately formed. Yet. We must never imagine that his counsels are like the counsels of men. God sees and knows all things at once. He declares the end from the beginning.

from us; but he does not cease to love us (Isa. 54:7-10). He afflicts us; but he does not cease to love us (Heb. 12:6-11).

GOD IS IMMUTABLE IN THE PROMISES OF HIS COVENANT (II Cor. 1:20). The everlasting covenant of grace was made with Christ before the world began. And it stands fast with him. All the blessings of the covenant are called “*sure mercies.*” They flow to us from the free and sovereign grace of God through Christ. And they cannot be reversed (Rom. 11:29). The Lord God has promised his elect all the blessings of grace and glory in that covenant ordered in all things and sure (Eph. 1:3-14). And all those blessings, in all their total fullness shall be given to and possessed by every chosen sinner. We are assured of this by many things; but none inspire more confidence than the fact that our God is immutable. He will never take away his gifts of grace. He will never charge his own elect with sin. He will never cease his own to cherish! Here is solid comfort for our souls (Isa. 54:10). Our God does not change and cannot be changed. Here is the foundation for faith (Mic. 7:18-20 - “*He delighteth in mercy!*”). Our God does not change and cannot be changed. Here is a great encouragement for prayer (I John 5:14). Our God does not change and cannot be changed. Here is terror for you who will not seek God’s mercy. God says, “*I will deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them*” (Ezek. 8:18). He does not change. Here is assurance and security for every believer. Our God does not change and cannot be changed. He declares, “*I am the LORD, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*”

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #3

The Sovereignty of God

Psalm 135:6

“Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places.” With these words David declares the sovereignty of God and calls for us to make him alone the object of our faith, worship, and praise.

There is no attribute of God more comforting and delightful to his children than his great and glorious sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe troubles, and when enduring the most heavy trials, we rejoice to know that our God has sovereignly ordained our afflictions, that he sovereignly overrules them, and that he sovereignly sanctifies them to our good and his own glory. Every believer rejoices in the sovereignty of God. There is no truth of Holy Scripture for which we must more earnestly contend than God’s dominion over all creation, his sovereignty over all the works of his hands, the supremacy of his throne and his right to sit upon it.

God’s saints rejoice to hear him say, *“Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?”* (Matt. 20:15). Nothing is more comforting to God’s saints in this world than the knowledge of the fact that *“Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased”* (Ps. 115:3). Believers rejoice in God’s sovereignty. Yet there is nothing revealed in the Bible that is more despised by worldlings and self-righteous religionists. Natural, unregenerate, unbelieving men and women are happy enough to have God everywhere, except upon the throne of total, universal sovereignty. They are happy to have God in his workshop, creating the world

and naming the stars. They are glad to have God in the hospital to heal the sick. They are pleased to have God in trouble, to calm the raging seas of life. And they are delighted to have God in the funeral parlor to ease them of pain and sorrow. But God upon his throne is, to the unregenerate man, the most contemptible thing in the world. And anyone who asserts that it is God's right to do what he will with his own, to dispose of his creatures as he sees fit, and save whom he will, will be hissed at, despised, and cursed by this religious generation. Be that as it may, it is God upon the throne whom we love, trust, and worship. And it is God upon the throne to whom we are obliged to bear witness among the idolatrous people of the world (Isa. 44:8).

Total, absolute, universal sovereignty is an attribute of God as essential to his Being as perfect holiness. A God who is not sovereign is as much a contradiction as a God who is not holy, eternal, and immutable. A God who is not sovereign is no God at all. And if the god you worship is not totally sovereign, you are a pagan, and your religion is idolatry. You would be just as well off to worship a statue of Mary, a totem pole, a spider, or the devil himself as to worship a god who lacks the attribute of total sovereignty over all things.

In one of his letters to the learned and scholarly Erasmus, Martin Luther said, "Your thoughts of God are too human." No doubt Erasmus resented the remark. But it exposed the heart of his heretical theology. And it exposes the heart of all false religion. I lay this charge against the preachers of our day and against the people who hear them, follow them, and support them - Their thoughts of God are too human. I know the seriousness of the charge; but it must be made. The God of the Bible is virtually unknown in this religious generation.

God's charge against apostate Israel was, "*Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself*" (Psa. 50:21), and that is his indictment against the religious world of our day. Men today

imagine that God is moved by sentiment, rather than by the determination of his sovereign will. They talk about omnipotence, but imagine that it is such an idle fiction that satan can thwart the power of God. They think that if God has a plan, it must, like the plans of men, be subject to constant change. They tell us that whatever power God does possess must be limited, lest he violate man's free-will and make him a robot. The grace of God is thought by most people to be nothing more than a helpless, frustrated desire in God to save men. The precious sin-atoning blood of Christ is thought by most to be a waste, shed in vain for many. And the invincible, saving power of the Holy Spirit is reduced by most to a gentle offer of grace which men may easily resist.

The god of this generation no more resembles the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth than a flickering candle resembles the mid-day sun. The god of modern religion is nothing but an idol, the invention of men, the figment of human imagination. Pagans in the dark ages used to carve their gods out of wood and stone and overlay them with silver and gold. Today, in these much darker days, pagans inside the church carve their god out of their own carnal imaginations. Either God is totally sovereign or he is not God at all.

In reality, the religionists of our day are atheists, for there is no possible alternative between a God who is absolutely sovereign and no God at all. A god whose will can be resisted, whose purpose can be frustrated, whose power can be thwarted, whose grace can be nullified, whose work can be overturned, has no title to Deity. Such a god is not a fit object of worship. Such a puny, pigmy god merits nothing but contempt!

When I assert that God is sovereign, I am simply declaring that God is God. He is the most High, Lord of heaven and earth, overall, blessed forever. He is subject to none. And he is influenced by none. God is absolutely independent of and sovereign over all his creatures. He does as he pleases, only as he pleases, and

always as he pleases. None can thwart him. None can resist him. None can change him. None can stop him. None can hinder him. He declares, *“My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure”* (Isa. 46:10). *“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. 4:35). Divine sovereignty means that God sits upon the throne of universal dominion, directing all things, ruling all things, and working all things *“after the counsel of his own will”* (Eph. 1:11).

When writing a brief article about the sovereignty of God, the greatest difficulty is deciding what omit. This is a subject about which hundreds of books have been written, and yet *“the half hath not been told.”* Divine sovereignty is not some isolated doctrine, taught in a few verses of Scripture. This fundamental, essential attribute of God is revealed upon every page of Inspiration. But in this study we will limit our thoughts to five revelations of the sovereignty of God. Here are five things which manifestly and irrefutably reveal the sovereignty of God.

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY IS IRREFUTABLY REVEALED IN HIS ETERNAL PREDESTINATION OF ALL THINGS. Does the Bible teach predestination? Of course it does! God chose some of Adam’s race from eternity as the objects of his saving grace and predestinated those elect ones to be conformed to the image of his dear Son (Rom. 8:28-29). Before the world began God sovereignly determined that he would save some, who they would be, and how he would save them. He determined to save his elect by the substitutionary work of Christ by redemption, regeneration, and resurrection. The Lord God even ordained the time, place, circumstances, and means by which he would call out his chosen (Ezek. 16:6-8). And, having determined these things, he infallibly secured his eternal purpose of grace by sovereign predestination. God predestinated everything from eternity that comes to pass in time to secure the salvation of his elect (Eph. 1:3-6, 11). *“All things are of God”* (II Cor. 5:18). Eternal election marked the house into

which God's saving grace must come. Divine predestination marked the path upon which grace must come. And sovereign providence led grace down the path to the house at the time of love. When the appointed time of love had come, the Son of God "*must needs go through Samaria*" (John 4:4), because a chosen sinner was there who must be saved at the hour appointed.

NO ONE CAN REASONABLY DENY THE REVELATION OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN HIS MARVELOUS WORK OF CREATION (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 4:11). Nothing moved God to create, except his own sovereign will. What could move him when there was nothing but God himself? Truly, "*The heavens declare the glory of God*" (Psa. 19:1-4). God created the heavens and the earth as a stage upon which to work out his purpose of grace (Psa. 8:1-9). He created the angelic host to be ministering spirits to those who shall be the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). The Lord God created the sun, the moon, and the stars for the benefit of man. He created all plants and animals to provide food, comfort, and pleasure for man. At last, God created man in his own image and after his own likeness that he might show forth the glory of his grace in man.

Adam was created in the image of Christ, our eternal Surety and Substitute, who was appointed to come as the image of the invisible God (Gen. 1:26; Heb. 1:3). He was created in conditional holiness. Adam was permitted to fall and we all fell in him according to the divine decree (Gen. 2:17), that we might be raised to life again in Christ the second Adam (Rom. 5:12-19; I Cor. 15:21-22).

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS DISPLAYED IN ALL THE WORKS OF HIS DAILY PROVIDENCE (Rom. 8:28; 11:36). In divine providence, God almighty sovereignly accomplishes his eternal purpose of grace in predestination. Carefully read Revelation 5:1-10 and 10:1-11. The Lamb presented in those passages is Christ. The book is God's purpose of predestination.

Christ, the Lamb of God, is portrayed as one who rules all things in providence by the book of God's predestination.

God's sovereign rule of providence extends to all his creatures. Inanimate matter, irrational creatures, all things in this world perform their Maker's bidding. At his pleasure the waters of the Red Sea divided (Ex. 14), the earth opened up her mouth to swallow his enemies (Num. 14), the sun stood still (Josh. 10), the sun went backward ten degrees on the sundial of Ahaz (II Kings 20:11). Once, he even made an ax head float (II Kings 6:6), ravens carried food to his prophet (I Kings 17), lions were tamed for his servant Daniel (Dan. 6), and the fire refused to burn his faithful servants, when they were cast into the fiery furnace (Dan. 3).

God's rule of providence extends to the wills and actions and words, even of wicked men. He kept Abimelech from adultery with Sarah (Gen. 20:2-6). He kept the Canaanites from desiring the possessions of Israel, when they went to worship him (Ex. 34:23-24). The king's heart, every king's heart, is in the hands of the Lord. He turns it as he will (Prov. 21:1). Shemei was sent of God to curse David (II Sam. 16:10). The wrath of man praises our God; and the remainder of wrath that is man, which God has not ordained for his praise, he restrains (Psa. 76:10).

The object of God's providence, the object of god in all that he does, or allows to be done, is threefold.

1. The salvation of his elect (Rom. 8:28-30).
2. The eternal, spiritual good of all his people.
3. The glory of his own great name (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

Here is a resting place for every believer's troubled heart. Neither satan, nor the demons of hell, nor men, nor sickness, nor war, nor pestilence, nor the whirlwind is beyond the reach of God's sovereign throne (Isa. 40:9-31).

GOD'S INDISPUTABLE SOVEREIGNTY IS CONSPICUOUSLY REVEALED IN THE SALVATION OF SINNERS BY HIS

ALMIGHTY GRACE (Rom. 9:8-24). I defy any man who denies God's total and absolute sovereignty to give an honest exposition of Romans chapter nine. Here it is plainly stated that God chose to save some, but not all. He gave Christ to die for some, but not all (John 10:11, 14, 26). Christ prays and makes intercession for some, but not all (John 17:9, 20). He sends his gospel to some, but not all (Acts 16:7). He gives his Spirit to some, but not all (Rom. 8:9). He causes some to hear his voice, but not all (Matt. 11:20-27). He saves some who seek him, but not all. He saved the woman with the issue of blood, but not the rich young ruler. He saved the leper who came to him, but not Nicodemus. He saved the Publican who prayed, but not the Pharisee. *"Salvation is of the Lord"* (Jon. 2::9). He planned it. He purchased it. He performs it. He preserves it. He perfects it. He alone shall have all praise for it.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS CONSPICUOUSLY REVEALED IN THE VARIOUS SPIRITUAL GIFTS HE BESTOWS UPON HIS PEOPLE (I Cor. 12:14, 18, 28-29). God sees to it that his church has all that she needs to carry out the work he has for her to do. Each member of Christ's body has been placed by him in the body in the place and with the gifts by which he can best serve the interests of Christ's kingdom (John 15:16; Eph. 4:1-16). Therefore, none of God's saints should ever be jealous or envious of the gifts given to another. We need missionaries; but we need pastors too. We need preachers; but we need deacons. We need witnesses; and we need prayers. We need workers; and we need givers. We need some to do great things and some to do small things. Let us each covet earnestly the best gift, the gift of love, and if we have that we will serve God and his people well in our place.

"Our God is in the heavens! He hath done (and is doing) whatsoever he hath pleased!" Believe him confidently. Walk with him in peace. Submit to him cheerfully. Serve him faithfully. Honor him supremely!

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD Lesson #4

The Omniscience Of God

Psalm 139:1-6

What a wondrous Being our God is! Psalm 139:1-6 describes a God who is omniscient. That simply means, "God knows everything." He knows everything possible and everything actual. He knows everything past, present, and future. God knows all things about all creatures and all events. "He is perfectly acquainted with every detail in the life of every being in heaven, in earth, and in hell" (A. W. Pink). Nothing escapes his notice. Nothing can be hidden from him. His knowledge is perfect, infinite, and immutable. God has never learned anything, or forgotten anything. His knowledge can never be increased or diminished. He is omniscient. "*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). Well might we all say with David, "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.*"

God's omniscience is not to be confused with his foreknowledge. Foreknowledge is an act of God's eternal will. Omniscience is an attribute of his Being. Foreknowledge is something God has done and something he possesses. Omniscience is something God is, an essential part of his character as God. Omniscience is God's perfect, infinite, universal knowledge, the knowledge of all things which he possesses from eternity. Every attribute of God's glorious Being should inspire our hearts with praise and honor to his great name. And as we begin to apprehend something of his omniscience, it should cause us to bow before him with reverence and adoration.

HERE IS A SOLEMN FACT - GOD IS OMNISCIENT. "*Thus saith the LORD, I know the things that come into your mind, every one of*

them" (Ezek. 11:5; See John 2:24; Heb. 4:12). Nothing is or can be concealed from God. He knows everything. God knows all that we do. But he knows much more. He knows our secret thoughts, motives, and desires. "*The Lord looketh on the heart.*" God is invisible to us. But we are not invisible to God. Neither the darkness of night, nor the secrecy of the closet, nor the most remote place in the world can hide us from God. The trees of the Garden could not conceal Adam and Eve from the eye of God when they had fallen. No human eye witnessed Cain when he murdered his brother, Abel. But God saw the deed. Sarah laughed in unbelief when God promised Abraham a son. She was in her tent. Abraham did not hear her laugh. Hagar did not hear her laugh. But God heard the laughter of her unbelief. When Achan stole the wedge of gold, he carefully hid it in the earth. But God found it and brought it to light before all Israel. David took great care to cover his sin in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba. But nothing was hidden from the Lord. If we kept this fact ever before our hearts, how it would alter our lives. Nothing is concealed from God! God knows everything. God sees everything. God observes everything. He sees right through hypocrisy. He sees the thoughts and intents of the heart. He sees every word and deed. Nothing is more disturbing to the hypocrite than God's omniscience. Every hypocrite would strip God of his omniscience if he could. They seek to banish it from their minds. God says, "*They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness*" (Hos. 7:2). God knows all the sins of all men (Psa. 90:8). If he charges sin against you, you cannot stand before him (Psa. 130:3). But we rejoice to know that God does forgive sin through the blood of Christ (Psa. 130:4; I John 1:9).

HERE IS A WORD OF COMFORT FOR EVERY BELIEVER - GOD IS OMNISCIENT. If we could but remember in all our times that our heavenly Father knows all things, it would greatly reduce both our fears and our murmurings against him. When Hagar was cast out of Abraham's house and her son Ishmael was about to die, the Lord came to her rescue and taught her a lesson I wish I could always remember. The lesson she learned is this - "***Thou God seest me***" (Gen. 16:13). If my heavenly Father, the One who loves me, chose

me by his grace, redeemed me by the blood of Christ, and called me to life and faith in him always sees me and knows all things concerning me, that is enough to comfort my soul in all times. I may be in trouble, but with Job I say, "*He knoweth the way that I take*" (Job 23:10). My troubles may be perplexing and mysterious to me. And my friends may be incapable of understanding them. But I am satisfied to know that, "*He knoweth!*" Though I am often weak and weary, my soul is comforted by the fact that, "*He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust*" (Psa. 103:14).

Sometimes I stand in doubt of my motives and hold my own heart in suspicion. Even then I appeal to God's omniscience and seek comfort in it, saying, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me (See if I am yet in the way of wickedness), and lead me in the way everlasting*" (Psa. 139:23-24). In times of sad failure and open sin, when my actions repudiate my profession and my deeds contradict my devotion, when my Lord comes to me and says, "*Lovest thou me?*", my heart appeals to his omniscience - "*Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee*" (John 21:17). For the believer, omniscience is not a terror, but a comfort. God knows my personal weaknesses and sins. But he also knows the righteous obedience and blood atonement of Christ, my Representative. And he knows what I truly am by his own grace. Others may not know, but he knows my faith in Christ, my love for Christ, and my desire to honor Christ. Is that not enough for you?

HERE IS AN ENCOURAGEMENT IN PRAYER - GOD IS OMNISCIENT. God's omniscience, like his goodness, grace, and eternal sovereignty, encourages his saints to pour out their hearts to him in prayer. **God whose knowledge is infinite is able to attend to all the needs of his people.** We have no reason to fear that our petitions will not be heard, or that our cries will escape the knowledge of God. He knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts. There is no danger that you might be overlooked in the midst of all the millions who supplicate God's throne at once. His infinite mind is capable of hearing all the cries of all his saints at one time and give the same attention to all as if there were only one

seeking his attention. **God's knowledge is so great that he hears our prayers, even when we cannot express them in words.** He hears not the language of our lips, but the longings of our hearts. We may use inappropriate language. We usually do. What language is appropriate for the ears of God? But our inability to speak as we should is no hindrance to our prayers. Listen to this promise from our omniscient God and rejoice, "*It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear*" (Isa. 65:24). "*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb. 4:16).

HERE IS A CAUSE FOR WORSHIP - GOD IS OMNISCIENT.

"*Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite*" (Psa. 147:5). God knows everything that has happened in the past, throughout all the universe. He knows everything that is now happening. And his knowledge of all things is so infinitely great that he knows and understands everything that shall come to pass in the future. His knowledge of the future is as complete and perfect as his knowledge of the past and the present, because everything future is entirely dependent upon him. Were it possible for something to come to pass apart from his direct agency or his deliberate permission, then something would be independent of God, and he would cease to be supreme. This is not a mere abstraction, or speculative point of theology. God's complete knowledge of all the future is inseparably connected with his Godhead and with his eternal purpose of grace. God purposed all that shall be. And what he purposed must be. His Word declares, God "*doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand*" (Dan. 4:35). "*The counsel of the Lord, that shall stand*" (Prov. 19:21). Because God is infinite in wisdom and power, all that he has purposed must be accomplished. It is no more possible for God to purpose something that he does not actually accomplish than it is for him to lie. We know, trust, love, and worship One who is God, omniscient and omnipotent, all-knowing and almighty.

We know that nothing relating to the future is uncertain.

Nothing in the universe is left to chance. Nothing ever has, does, or shall happen by accident. The counsels and decrees of the omniscient God must be precisely fulfilled. None of God's purposes and decrees are contingent upon the acts of his creatures or upon secondary causes. God's decrees include the secondary causes! There is no future event which is a mere possibility, something which may or may not come to pass. It is written, "*Known unto God are all his works from the beginning*" (Acts 15:18). That which God knows, he has decreed. And that which God has decreed is absolutely certain. He is without variableness or shadow of turning (James 1:17). He changes not in Person, in purpose, or in knowledge. Therefore, he is able to declare that future things are "*things which must shortly come to pass*" (Rev. 1:1).

God's perfect knowledge of all things, even future things, is clearly exemplified throughout the Scriptures. All the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the nation of Israel display his omnipotence (400 years in Egypt, 70 years of Babylonian captivity, etc.). All the prophecies concerning Christ's life, death, and resurrection (Isa. 52:13-53:10) reveal his omnipotence. All the promises and prophecies of the New Testament regarding eternity attest to our God's omniscience (Christ's second coming, the salvation of God's elect, the resurrection of the dead, the new creation, and eternity). No prophecy of Scripture can be believed apart from the omniscience of God. And the omniscience of God cannot be believed apart from the sovereign decrees and power of God. Indeed, apart from these things we cannot believe one promise of God, one Word from God, or even in God himself!

Yet, God's omniscience, his knowledge of all things, is not the cause of all things. Nothing ever comes to pass because God knows that it shall come to pass. The cause of all things is the will of God. Anyone who believes the Bible knows that Spring must follow Winter, Summer must follow Spring, Fall must follow Summer, and Winter must follow Fall as long as the world stands (Gen. 8:22). But our knowledge of these facts has nothing to do

with causing the seasons of the year. Even so, God's knowledge does not cause things to happen. God's will, his decree, his predestination causes things to happen. And his knowledge is unchangeable, because his will is unchangeable. For example, God knew of Christ's death upon the cross as the sinner's Substitute, and predicted it hundreds of years before his incarnation, because in his eternal purpose Christ was "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*" Therefore, he was delivered into the hands of wicked men and slain "*by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*" (Acts 2:23).

God is omniscient. "*The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*" (Prov. 15:3). This knowledge of God's omniscience should fill our hearts with wonder, cause us to walk before God with great awe, inspire us with confident faith in our Lord, and fill every redeemed sinner with adoration. Here is the wonder of it: Our entire existence was known to God from the beginning. He knew from eternity everything about us, the corruption of our nature, our every sin, our every fall, and every evil thought of our hearts. Yet, from eternity he set his heart upon us! He chose us! He redeemed us! He called us! He keeps us! He even uses us for the praise of his glory!

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD Lesson #5

Divine Foreknowledge

1 Peter 1:2

Peter declares that all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ unto life everlasting are *“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”* How we rejoice in God’s electing love! God’s gracious, sovereign election of our unworthy souls unto salvation is the source and cause of every heavenly, spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3-4). Christ redeemed us because God elected us. The Holy Spirit called us and gave us faith because God elected us. We are kept by the power of his grace because God elected us. We shall obtain and enter into the glory of our inheritance in heaven because God elected us unto salvation, that he might make us holy and without blame forever in his sight, to the praise of the glory of his grace. We rejoice in God’s electing love!

“Tis not that I did choose Thee, For, Lord, that could not be.

This heart would still refuse Thee, Hadst Thou not chosen me.
Thou from the sin that stained me Hast washed and set me free,
And to this end ordained me, That I should live to Thee.

’Twas sovereign mercy called me And taught my opening mind;
The world had else enthralled me, To heavenly glories blind.
My heart owns none before Thee, For Thy rich grace I thirst,
This knowing, if I love Thee, Thou must have loved me first.”

In this text Peter tells us four things about our election of God. **1. Election is an act of God the Father.** There are some men and women in this world who must and shall be saved, because God the Father chose them in eternal election (2 Thess.

2:13-14). The names of God's elect were written in the Lamb's book of life from eternity. And in the end of time they will all be found seated before the throne of God and of the Lamb, arrayed in the white robe of Christ's perfect righteousness. We do not know who God's elect are. Therefore, we preach the gospel to all men, calling upon all to repent and believe on Christ. As soon as a sinner believes on Christ, confessing faith in him, we declare, "Here is one of God's elect." Faith in Christ is the fruit and the proof of God's election. If you now believe on Christ, you are "*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*" You now believe because God before the foundation of the world chose you in Christ as the object of his eternal love and grace.

2. Our election by God the Father was "*through sanctification of the Spirit.*" The word "sanctification" simply means "to separate." Before the world began God the Holy Spirit separated us from the rest of Adam's race and separated us unto God, making us holy. Sanctified men and women are holy people, holy because they belong to God. Our sanctification is threefold. All who believe have been sanctified to God in Christ...

- By election, which gave us positional righteousness (Jude 1),
- By redemption, which gave us judicial righteousness (Heb. 10:10-14),
- And by regeneration, which gave us imparted righteousness (II Pet. 1:4).

3. This election of grace which took place in eternity was unto salvation. Election is not salvation. Election is unto salvation. We were chosen "*unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.*" The obedience Peter is talking about is not our obedience to God, but Christ's obedience to God as our Representative by which we are made righteous (Rom. 5:19). And the sprinkling of the blood of Christ refers to the accomplishment of redemption by which our sins have been put away. It refers both to the sprinkling of the blood in heaven upon the mercy-seat (Heb. 9:11-12) and to the sprinkling of the blood upon our consciences in

conversion (Heb. 9:13-14). Though election guaranteed and secured our salvation by the grace of God, we could not be saved without the obedience and death of Christ as our Substitute; and we could not be saved apart from the application of Christ's atonement to our own hearts by the Spirit.

4. And our election, Peter tells us is, “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” What is this “foreknowledge”? That is the question I want to answer in this study. It is a matter of great importance. Though divine foreknowledge is not really an attribute of God, it is an act of God's grace intimately related to his attribute of omniscience. It is a subject so commonly misunderstood by men that it needs to be carefully explained from the Word of God. It is the common practice of false prophets to pervert God's foreknowledge into a denial of his total sovereignty in salvation, making election and grace conditional not upon the will of God, but upon the will of man. Such teaching contradicts the plainest statements of Holy Scripture. The Bible plainly declares that salvation is not, in any way, dependent upon or conditioned upon the will of man (John 1:13; Rom. 9:16). Yet, satan's messengers of deceit, in their effort to uphold the great “free-will” of man and to deny the sovereignty of God's grace, tell us that God's foreknowledge is foreseen faith and obedience in man!

They tell us that God foresaw that some sinners would be willing to respond favorably to the gentle impulses of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts. Therefore, because God knew they would believe, he predestinated them to salvation and elected them as the objects of his grace. Is this what Peter means when he declares that we are “*elect according to the foreknowledge of God*”? Of course not! Such perverse doctrine has the slime of the serpent's tail upon it. It is a base perversion of the grace of God. It is the doctrine of antichrist, for it makes salvation the work of man rather than of God in Christ. **It is a denial of man's total depravity**, for it suggests that there is something good and noble in some men, a willingness to trust Christ by nature. **It denies the sovereignty of**

God, for it makes God's election to be determined by the will of the sinner. **It frustrates the grace of God**, turning the whole work of grace upside down. We are told that because God foresaw that some people would believe in Christ he predestinated them to eternal life. But the Bible says exactly the opposite (Acts 13:48). False religion makes God's foreknowledge of man's faith the cause of election and grace. But the Word of God declares that God's election and grace is the cause of our faith. Though God's foreknowledge of his elect in Christ has been terribly perverted by those who despise the gospel of his free and sovereign grace in Christ, it is a matter of comfort and joy to the believer. It inspires praise and honor toward our God. Study it carefully in the light of Holy Scripture and you will find it both edifying and comforting to your soul.

WE CANNOT COMPREHEND DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE BY HUMAN REASON. What does the word "foreknowledge" mean? If you take down a dictionary and look the word up, you will find that it means "knowledge of a thing before it happens; prescience." But if you try to apply that definition to the word, as it is used in the Bible, it will not work. **We must interpret the words of Scripture as they are used by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures.** The Holy Spirit's use of a word always defines its meaning and scope. *For example:* The word "flesh" does not usually mean the physical body, but the Adamic nature (Rom. 7:18). The word "world" does not usually refer to the whole human race, but to a specific part of it (Lk. 2:1; John 3:16). "Immortality" does not merely refer to the indestructibility of the soul, but to the resurrection body as well (I Cor. 15:51-57). And the word "all" does not mean all without exception, but all of a specific number (Rom. 5:18-19). In the Bible the words "knowledge," "know," and "foreknowledge" have a much deeper meaning than "to be aware of." The word "foreknowledge" is never used in the Old Testament. But, the word "know" is often used to describe God's gracious favor and affection for his people. God's knowledge, in this sense, is not a possession of his nature, but an act of his will (Ex. 33:17; Deut. 9:24; Jer. 1:5;

Amos 3:2). In all these places the word “know” means “to love” or “to appoint.” The word “know” is used in precisely the same way in the New Testament (Matt. 7:23; John 10:14; I Cor. 8:3; II Tim. 2:19). God’s foreknowledge of his elect is his love for them. It is an act of God’s heart, which separates and distinguishes his elect from all others.

GOD’S FOREKNOWLEDGE IS NEVER RELATED TO EVENTS, THINGS, OR ACTS, BUT ALWAYS TO PEOPLE. Look up every text where the word “foreknowledge” is used. You will see that the Bible never speaks of God foreknowing world events or the actions of men. It only speaks of God foreknowing people (Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29-30; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:2). The word “foreknowledge” is found only in these four places in our English Bible. We do not read, in any of these, that God foreknew that some people would repent and believe on Christ, or that he elected to save some because he foreknew that they would be willing to be saved. God foreknew his own elect. In every place where “foreknowledge” is used, it means that he loved, approved of, and accepted his elect in Christ, and foreordained us to be conformed to his image.

THE BASIS OF GOD’S FOREKNOWLEDGE IS HIS OWN ETERNAL DECREE. God’s foreknowledge is not the cause of his decree. His decree is the cause of his foreknowledge. God’s foreknowledge of Christ as our Substitute was the result of his determinate counsel that Christ be our Substitute (Acts 2:23). God’s foreknowledge of us as his sons is the result of his decree of election by which he purposed to make us his sons (Rom. 8:28-29). God foreknew us because he elected us. He predestinated us to be his sons, not because he foreknew we would be; but he foreknew us as his sons because he predestinated us to be his sons (I John 3:1). Why is this so important? To make foreseen or foreknown faith the cause of election would be to declare that (1.) Faith is a meritorious act; (2.) God’s grace is determined by the will of man; (3.) Man is his own savior; (4.) The difference between the saved sinner and the lost sinner is not the grace of God, but the free-will

of man; and (5.) God must share the glory of salvation with man, because man's decision is ultimately the determining factor in salvation. Such absurdities are blatantly contrary to the revelation of Holy Scripture. God's saints affirm and rejoice to know that *"Salvation is of the Lord."* With the Apostle Paul, every regenerate sinner says, *"By the grace of God I am what I am"*. We were chosen by grace (Rom. 11:5). We were redeemed by grace (Rom. 3:24). We were called by grace (Tit. 3:4-5). We *"believed through grace"* (Acts 18:27). And we are kept by grace (I Pet. 1:5).

DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE IS A SOURCE OF GREAT COMFORT AND CHEER TO GOD'S PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD. If foreknowledge were nothing but what God foreknew we would do or be by our own free-will, what possible comfort could we find in it? Thank God, it is not so. But when we understand, according to the Scriptures, that God's foreknowledge is his immutable love and approval of us in Christ, our hearts rejoice (II Tim. 2:19). Those whom God foreknew he will never cast away. In the midst of our trials, our souls are sustained in peace by God's foreknowledge (Nah. 1:7). We rejoice in our knowledge of God, but our hope and confidence is in God's knowledge of us. He knows us in Christ. He loves us in Christ. He approves of us in Christ. He accepts us in Christ. Child of God, your heavenly Father's foreknowledge of you ought to fill your heart with cheer. God knows who you are, what you are, where you are, what you need, and what he will do with you. But this is even better - He knows you! That is enough!

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #6

The Omnipotence of God

Psalm 62:11 and Revelation 19:6

All power belongs to God. He is *“the Lord God omnipotent”* who reigns everywhere. “Omnipotence is essential to God. It is his nature. A weak Deity is an absurdity” (John Gill). A. W. Pink wrote, “We cannot have a right conception of God unless we think of Him as all-powerful, as well as all-wise. He who cannot do what he will and perform all his pleasure cannot be God. As God has a will to resolve what he deems good, so he has power to execute his will.”

“The power of God is that ability and strength whereby he can bring to pass whatsoever he pleases...As holiness is the beauty of all God’s attributes, so power is that which gives life and action to all the perfections of the Divine nature. How vain would be the eternal counsels, if power did not step in to execute them. Without power his mercy would be but feeble pity, his promises an empty sound, his threatenings a mere scarecrow. God’s power is like himself: infinite, eternal, incomprehensible. It can neither be checked, restrained, nor frustrated by the creature” (Stephen Charnock).

“Power belongeth unto God,” and to God alone. No creature in all the universe has a single particle of power, except that which God has given him. But God’s power is unacquired. No one gives him power. He is power! It belongs to him inherently.

C. H. Spurgeon said, “God’s power is like himself, self-existent, self-sustained. The mightiest of men cannot add so much as a shadow of increased power to the omnipotent One. He sits on no buttressed throne and leans on no assisting arm. His court is not

maintained by his courtiers, nor does it borrow its splendor from his creatures. He is himself the great central Source and Originator of all power.”

Power is synonymous with God. To speak of God is to speak of power. To speak of power is to speak of God. The two cannot be separated. We read of the *“Son of man sitting at the right hand of power”* (Mk. 14:62). And that is the right hand of God. As God’s essence is immense, not confined to any place, and eternal, not measured by time, so it is almighty, not limited in ability.

God’s omnipotence is infinitely beyond the reach of human understanding. There is infinitely more power in God than he has revealed in his wonderful works (Job 26:5-14; 38:4-6). In fact, the prophet Habakkuk plainly tells us that all the stunning works of God’s power, by which we are astonished, are *“the hiding of his power”* (Hab. 3:4), rather than the displaying of his power. In other words, the power of God is so great, so inconceivable, so immense, so uncontrollable, that his great and mighty works conceal more than they reveal of his omnipotence! How great our God is in power! He is omnipotent, the Almighty. Here are eight works of omnipotence which, when thoughtfully considered, ought to inspire every heart to worship and adore *“the Lord God omnipotent.”*

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD (Psa. 89:11-13) - Creation is a work of omnipotence. God *“spoke and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast”* (Psa. 33:9). *“Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is”* (Acts 4:24). (See Gen. 1:1-3; John 1:1-3; Heb. 11:3). Before man can work, he must have material with which to work. But God created all things out of nothing. Before man can build, he must have tools. But God built the universe by his Word. We do not know how many worlds God has created. But he who made one world could just as easily have made ten thousand worlds. Yet, omnipotence has never been exerted to its utmost. Creation is easier for God than breathing is for us! (See Psa. 8:1-9).

THE PRESERVATION OF THE UNIVERSE (Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:3) - Our God declares, *"The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it"* (Psa. 75:3). There is no such thing as "self-preservation" or "Survival of the fittest." *"Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow up without water?"* (Job 8:11). Both man and beast would perish, were it not for the vegetation of the earth. And the vegetation of the earth would die, were it not for the sunshine and the rain. Therefore God is called the Preserver of *"man and beast"* (Psa. 36:6). The unfathomable omnipotence of God is seen in the preservation of the world. Where does he store water for the earth? In clouds! How does he keep the oceans from flooding the earth? With sand! God simply says to the waters of the sea, *Hitherto shalt thou go and no further, here shall thy proud waves be stayed"* (Job 38:11). How does God light the world? With the sun, constantly burning with gases. Breathe, the breath in your lungs is a monument to omnipotence. Hear the rippling creek, the singing bird, and the hopping rabbit. Feel the warmth of the sun, the chill of winter, the dew on the ground, and the pulse of your heart, and know this - God is omnipotent! *"He walketh among the waves of the sea"* (Job 9:8). *"he walketh in the circuit of heaven"* (Job 22:14). *"He walketh upon the wings of the wind"* (Psa. 104:3).

THE WONDERS OF PROVIDENCE (Rom. 8:28) - Not only does God preserve the whole of creation, he rules all things by his absolute power for the good of his elect. Satan is a roaring lion. But God controls him. Man is a cruel beast. But God holds him in check (Psa. 76:10). (Read Psa. 93:1-5). Let every child of God rejoice! Our heavenly Father sits upon the throne of universal dominion. He rules the world with unlimited, omnipotent power. And he does everything for the eternal, spiritual good of his own elect.

THE REDEMPTION OF SINNERS BY CHRIST - Everything regarding our redemption by Christ reflects the omnipotence of God our Savior. **Christ's incarnation was a work of omnipotence** (Lk.

1:35-37). In order to save us God brought a clean thing out of an unclean. He brought forth his Son out of the womb of Mary. As Omnipotence formed a body for our Savior, **Omnipotence protected him throughout the days of his life** (Rev. 12). In his infancy he was protected from the malice of Herod, after his baptism from the violence of satan, and later from the snares of the Scribes and Pharisees. **Our Savior himself, while he was in this world, displayed his omnipotence as God.** The Man Christ Jesus is the Lord God omnipotent! By his own divine power he healed the sick, cleansed the leper, raised the dead, and calmed the raging storm. **The death of Christ, for the accomplishment of our redemption, was an act of Divine omnipotence.** Omnipotence delivered him into the hands of men (Acts 2:23). Omnipotence ruled the deeds of men (Acts 4:27-28). Omnipotence endured the wrath of God (Heb. 12:2). Omnipotence gave up the ghost (John 10:17-18). Omnipotence made an end of sin (Isa. 63:1-5). Omnipotence brought in everlasting righteousness (Isa. 59:16-17). **And the resurrection and exaltation of Christ was the work of God's omnipotence.** Our Redeemer was declared to be the Son of God with power, when he was raised from the dead, triumphant over death, hell, and the grave (Rom. 1:4). The risen Christ possesses and exercises omnipotent power and dominion for the salvation of his people (Matt. 28:18; John 17:2). (See Psa. 68:18-20).

THE SALVATION OF GOD'S ELECT (Psa. 110:3; Eph. 1:19) - The grace of God is not a helpless desire in God to save. Grace is omnipotent, irresistible, and effectual. Salvation is a work of God's omnipotence. Salvation involves a creation (II Cor. 5:17); and creation, as we have already seen, is the work of God alone. Sinners are not made new creatures in Christ by their will, but by God's omnipotent will (Rom. 9:16). Regeneration is a resurrection from the dead (Eph. 2:1-4). It takes something more than a decision in men to raise the dead. Resurrection requires omnipotence! Conversion is a conquest of grace (Psa. 65:4). Grace chose its

objects and omnipotent grace effectually causes all the chosen to come to Christ in repentance and faith.

THE SUCCESS AND PERPETUITY OF THE GOSPEL

(Rev. 6:1-2; 19:11-16) - God chose to save men by the foolishness of preaching. And generally he uses the most unlikely men to be his messengers, so that all the glory might be to him alone. But our omnipotent Savior has gone forth in the preaching of the gospel, conquering and to conquer. And in all places, at all times, the gospel is triumphant by God's omnipotent grace. Because God is omnipotent we are assured that he will never leave himself without a witness (Ps. 22:30-31); his truth shall prevail (Ps. 85:11, 14); his church can never be destroyed (Mt. 16:18); and his kingdom shall be triumphant (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF EVERY BELIEVER

(John 10:27-30; 1 Pet. 1:5) - All who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are kept by the power of God, by his great and glorious omnipotence (John 10:28; Phil. 1:6; 2 Pet. 1:5). Because God is omnipotent as well as faithful, immutable, and gracious, redeemed sinners are assured that their salvation is forever, and that they cannot be destroyed (Ecc. 3:14). Though we are tormented by our indwelling sin, vexed by the temptations of satan, constantly confronted with the tempting charms of the world, and daily opposed by the heresies of men, nothing shall prevail to destroy one of God's elect. *"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his"* (2 Tim. 2:19)..

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD (John 5:28-29) -

Were it not for God's omnipotence, the resurrection of the dead would be an incredible, unbelievable thing. But God is omnipotent. And the dead shall rise (John 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:51-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 1:7). Omnipotence will raise the dead. Omnipotence will judge the world. Omnipotence will torment the damned. And omnipotence will bless the righteous.

“The Lord God omnipotent reigneth! Let his enemies tremble. Let his saints adore him (Ex. 15:11). Let his people trust him. No prayer is too hard for God to answer. No need is too great for God to supply. No passion is too strong for God to subdue. No temptation is too powerful for God to overcome (1 Cor. 10:13). No misery is too deep for God to relieve. (Psa. 27:1; Eph. 3:20-21).

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #7

Our Infinite, Eternal, Omnipresent God

John 4:24

That which Elijah prayed, when he both denounced the prophets of Baal and mocked their God, ought to be the goal and driving ambition of every believer, every preacher, and every church. *“It came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy Word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God”* (I Kings 18:36-37). I want all people to know that the Lord our God is God indeed and that he alone is God. Let us ever pray that God the Holy Spirit will be pleased to use us to turn men and women away from the idolatrous vanities of their corrupt imaginations that they may fall down before the throne of the living God in reverent faith and adoration.

God’s greatness is to be seen in those magnificent attributes of his Being which are essential to him as God and distinguish him from all his creatures. The three attributes of God that are now under consideration, (Infinity, Eternality, and Omnipresence), are attributes of God alone. He who is infinite, eternal, and omnipresent is God. These three magnificent attributes of God are full of comfort for his children. They are so closely related to one another that they may be best appreciated when considered together. In John 4:24 the Lord Jesus Christ tells us, *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.”* God does not have a body, consisting of parts and material substance, as we do. *“God is a Spirit.”* His spiritual nature him being the uncreated Spirit

by whom all things were made, implies that he is infinite, eternal, and omnipresent.

GOD IS INFINITE. “When we say that God is infinite, the meaning is, that he is unbounded and unlimited, unmeasurable, or immense, unsearchable and not to be comprehended” (John Gill). God dwells alone in his infinity. There is none before him to limit him, none after him to limit him, and none above him to limit him (Isa. 44:3:10; 44:6). As we have already seen, our great, infinite God is the only totally independent Being. All things depend upon God; but God depends upon nothing. All things are of him, through him, to him, and by him; but God dwells alone. All things are checked by God; but God is checked by nothing. All things are limited by God; but God is limited by nothing. God is infinite; and he alone is infinite. No creature is infinite. No thought, word, deed, work, or possession of any finite creature can be infinite. Indeed, nothing created is infinite. Space is not infinite. Time is not infinite. Light is not infinite. Darkness is not infinite. Only God is infinite. Infinity distinguishes God and sets him apart from all his creatures. We sometimes speak of sin as an infinite evil. But even that is not strictly accurate. The God against whom we sin is infinite. But sin is not infinite. Sin is the finite act of finite creatures. However, our sins, because they are acts of enmity against the infinite God, demand an infinite satisfaction. That is the reason why none but Christ, the Son of God, could make atonement for sin. Finite creatures can never render infinite satisfaction to the infinite God. That is the reason why hell is eternal. The sufferings of finite creatures in hell can never satisfy the offended justice of the infinite God (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11). Here is the good news of the gospel - Christ, the infinite God, our Savior, has rendered infinite satisfaction to God for our sins by his obedience and death in our nature, as our Substitute before God (Isa. 53:10). Therefore, all for whom satisfaction has been made must go free.

Complete atonement Christ has made, The law's demanded price
He paid:

All that His people owed to God, He satisfied by His own blood.

Christ Jesus my discharge procured, The whole of wrath divine
endured:

The law's tremendous curse He bore; Justice can never ask for
more!

God alone is infinite. And God is infinite in all the attributes of his Being. Everything that God is is infinite. **His understanding is infinite** (Psa. 147:4-5). God sees, knows, comprehends, and understands all things perfectly and at once. *"There is no searching of his understanding"* (Isa. 40:28). In comparison with God's wisdom the wisdom of the heavenly angels is only folly (Job 4:18). **His power is infinite.** With God nothing is impossible. His power has never yet been exerted. All power is his. He who created one world by his eternal power could have made ten million worlds. He spoke this one into being and upholds it by the word of his power (Rom. 1:20; Heb. 11:3). There is no end to God's infinite power. *"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"* No. His power is infinite. **His goodness is infinite** (Mic. 7:18-20). I have heard men say, "There is a limit to God's goodness." But that is not so. There may be a limit to your enjoyment of God's providential goodness in this world. But there is no limit to the goodness of God. He is good, eternally good, always good, and infinitely good. Particularly, he is infinitely good to all his people in Christ. **His holiness is infinite.** There is none holy but God. None are pure and righteous before him. Even the holy angels are not pure in the sight of his infinite holiness (Job 4:17-18). Once we understand that God alone is holy and that he is perfectly holy, so perfectly holy that he can receive, accept, and look favorably upon nothing except that which is perfectly holy (Lev. 22:21; Ps. 24:3-4; Matt. 5:20; Heb. 12:14), then we know that salvation could be accomplished for us only by an infinite and perfect Substitute. No man can make himself holy, righteous, and pure in the sight of God (Job 14:4). Our only hope of acceptance with him is the imputation of Christ's purity, righteousness, and holiness to us by the grace of God (Rom. 3:23-26). All who are

made pure before God by divine imputation are clothed with humility before him (Isa. 6:2-3), knowing and confessing that our acceptance with him is altogether his work (Ps. 115:1). **God's love is infinite** (Eph. 3:18). Though God's love is manifestly limited to his elect as its only objects (Isa. 43:3-4), his love toward his elect in Christ is without beginning, without cause, without condition, without end, and without limit.

Do you see the unsearchable greatness of our God? He is infinite, immense, incomprehensible. The heavens cannot contain him, much less our puny minds. God measures all things; but he is measured by none. God comprehends all things; but he is comprehended by none. We know him by faith in Christ; but our ignorance far outweighs our knowledge. God is too big for our brains. No creature can ever begin to comprehend the infinite God. In heaven's glory we will know God in perfection; but even then we will not know him perfectly, fully, comprehensively. One glory of heaven will be the saints' ever increasing knowledge of our great, infinite God. Because he is infinite...

GOD IS ETERNAL. God is not limited by time. He is eternal. The infinite God is the One who inhabits eternity. He is the eternal King, the everlasting God (Gen. 21:33; Deut. 33:27; Isa. 40:28; Rom. 16:26; I Tim. 1:17). That which is eternal is without beginning, without end, and without succession of time. It never changes. In this sense God alone is eternal. We speak of eternal happiness for the saints in heaven and eternal misery for the damned in hell; and the Bible describes our salvation as the gift from God of eternal life. But the word "eternal," in that sense, simply means everlasting. That which is everlasting has a beginning, but no end. When the Bible speaks of God being eternal, the meaning is that he comprehends in himself the everlasting past and the everlasting future (Psa. 90:2). God alone is eternal, without beginning, without end, and without succession of time or change. Eternity, like infinity and omnipresence, is an attribute belonging to each of the three

persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When we say that God is eternal, three things are implied.

First, God is without beginning. There never was a time when God began to be. He is self-existent and independent. God alone possesses immortality in the essence of his Being. He has made his angels immortal spirits and men to be immortal souls. But their immortality and ours depends entirely upon God. He makes us immortal. But he could annihilate us as easily as he made us, were it his pleasure to do so. God, however, is essentially immortal. And he alone is immortal (I Tim. 6:16), because God alone is eternal. Everything about God, every attribute of his Being, is eternal. His power is eternal (Rom. 1:20). His knowledge is eternal (Acts 15:18). His mercy is eternal (Psa. 103:17). His love is eternal (Jer. 31:3; I John 4:16). All God's purposes, counsels, and decrees are eternal, too. They are all of old, even from everlasting (Isa. 25:1; Eph. 3:11). His covenant of grace is an everlasting, eternal covenant (II Sam. 23:5). His blessings of grace are eternal blessings (Eph. 1:3). His election is an eternal election (Eph. 1:3; II Thess. 2:13). His book of life is an eternal book (Rev. 17:8). His salvation is an eternal salvation (II Tim. 1:9).

Second, as he is without beginning, God is without end. He is called, "*the incorruptible God*" (Rom. 1:23). God is over all, blessed forever. His dominion is an everlasting dominion. He is the most high God who lives for ever and ever (Rev. 4:9-10; 10:6). Let me again emphasize the fact that God is totally independent. It is a fact that seems to have been forgotten in this day of spiritual ignorance and darkness. God does not depend upon any of his creatures for anything. His Being, his glory, his happiness and his satisfaction are all in himself. He does not need us. Because he is infinite and eternal, he is independent. Therefore we are assured that...

1. His counsel stand forever (Psa. 33:11).
2. He keeps his truth forever (Psa. 146:6).
3. His covenant stands fast with Christ forever (Psa. 89:28).

4. He sustains his elect in grace forever (Psa. 89:33-36).
5. God will be the portion of his saints forever (Ps. 73:25-26).

Third, God is without succession of time. Time means nothing to the Ancient of Days (II Pet. 3:8). God is not restricted, limited, constrained, pushed, or hindered by time. Time is his servant, not his master. Time moves by him. God does not move by time. He never gets in a hurry, never gets frustrated, is never pushed, and never changes. God is eternity; and he inhabits eternity. With him there is no beginning of days, nor end of life. God is eternal.

GOD IS OMNIPRESENT. That simply means, God is everywhere, at all times, in all the fullness of his infinite, eternal Being. As he is eternal, unlimited by time, so he is omnipresent, unlimited by space and place (Acts 17:27-28; Psa. 139:7-10). The Lord Jesus Christ, God our Savior, this magnificent, infinite, eternal God is to us *“a God at hand and not far off”* (Jer. 23:23-24; Phil. 4:4). Though his human nature is limited by time and space, his divine nature is not. He is with us, always, everywhere with us. **Our God is gloriously present with his saints in heaven. He is powerfully present in the exercise of his dominion throughout the universe** (Isa. 66:1). He **is graciously present with his elect throughout the earth** in the assembly of his saints (Matt. 18:20; Rev. 1:13), in the ministry of his gospel (Matt. 28:20; Rev. 1:12), in the trials we must face (Isa. 41:10; 43:1-5), and in the indwelling of his Spirit. He says, *“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come unto you”* (John 14:15-18). He promises to be with us throughout our time on this earth, through all this valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:6). After this, we shall be with him and him with us in the perfection of eternal life forever

“The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I will not
desert to its foes;

That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I’ll never, no
never, no never forsake!”

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #8

The Holiness of God

Exodus 15:11

God is “*glorious in holiness.*” That is to say, the essence of God’s glory is his holiness. Holiness is his nature. God is holiness. And holiness is God. Holiness is not one of God’s many attributes, like omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. Holiness is the essence of all God’s attributes. But what is holiness? Who can define it? I readily admit that I am in waters too deep for me when I begin even to think about the holiness of God, much less write about it! Usually, we attach the idea of moral purity and perfection to the word holiness. And, certainly, anyone who is holy must be morally pure and perfect. But moral purity does not begin to describe the meaning of God’s holiness. Holiness is the transcendence of God. It is the supreme, absolute greatness of God, that which sets him apart from and infinitely above all his creatures. I once heard *Pastor Scott Richardson* say, “Holiness has something to do with wholeness. The holiness of God is the whole perfection of his infinite Being.”

I have no hope of explaining, or even adequately identifying, God’s holiness. When I have told you all that I know about it, I will have said very little. I only hope to say enough in this study to inspire the reader’s heart to worship, honor, adore, love, and trust the great and holy Lord God.

GOD ALONE IS ESSENTIALLY HOLY. The angels of God are holy angels; and his saints are holy, but not essentially holy. Angels, though fallen, are still angels; and men, though fallen, are still men, though they have no holiness. Their holiness and ours is derived holiness. God’s is not. God would not be God were he not

holy. Holiness is essential to his Being. God is *"The Holy One"* (Isa. 40:25; Hos. 11:9; I Sam. 2:2; Rev. 15:4). *"Holy and reverend is his name"* (Psa. 111:9). *John Gill* wrote, "God only is essentially, originally, underivatively, perfectly, and immutably holy." The puritan, *Thomas Brooks*, said, "Holiness in angels and saints is but a quality, but in God it is his essence...God's holiness and his nature are not two things. They are but one. God's holiness is his nature, and God's nature is his holiness." Holiness is the luster, glory, and harmony of God's nature and attributes. It is *"the beauty of the Lord"* (Psa. 27:4). What is wisdom and knowledge without holiness, but craft and cunning? What is power without holiness, but tyranny, oppression, and cruelty? The Lord our God is *"glorious in holiness."* Holiness is the glory of his Being and the beauty of his nature.

All that God is is holy. This is one evidence of the divine origin of Holy Scripture. We know that the Bible is God's inspired Word because it reveals a perfectly holy God. Such a God as this is not the invention of man's depraved mind (Psa. 50:21). The god who is acknowledged by the vast majority of religious people is little more than an indulgent old man who has no personal sin, but is tolerant of sin in others and so full of mercy that he is willing to compromise truth and righteousness to rescue men and women from the consequences of their sins, even if he cannot rescue them from sin itself. The God of the Bible is not an indulgent old man. He is omnipotent; and he is holy. He will by no means clear the guilty. This God will either remove your guilt, or he will remove you.

All that God does is holy. Every work of God's hand has the stamp of holiness upon it, reflecting in some way the character of God himself (Psa. 145:17). In creation he stamped upon the consciences of all men a sense of moral righteousness (his law); so that all men by nature know good from evil and are condemned by their evil deeds (Rom. 2:14-15). In providence God often displays his anger with man's sin in acts of judgment. The current AIDS epidemic is as manifestly an act of providential judgment upon our

perverse society as the fire and brimstone rained upon Sodom in Lot's day. Our redemption by the blood of Christ, above all else, shows forth the holiness and justice of God's character (Rom. 3:24-26). God is so perfectly holy that he would not and could not forgive the sins of his elect apart from the satisfaction of his justice by the blood of his own dear Son. God is holy in creation, in providence, in redemption, and in the exercise of his grace. And he is holy in all his acts of judgment. When he sits upon the great white throne of judgment in the last day, when all men are gathered before him, he will grant eternal life to his elect in Christ and sentence the wicked to eternal death in hell upon the grounds of strict holiness, justice, and truth. Unless we stand before him washed in the blood of Christ and robed with his imputed righteousness, we will be damned forever. Justice demands it. But if we are washed in Christ's blood and robed in his righteousness, we shall enter into everlasting glory. Justice demands it (Rev. 20:12; 22:11).

Because God is holy, he hates all sin. Yes, God hates "*all workers of iniquity*" (Psa. 5:5). He is "*angry with the wicked every day*" (Psa. 7:11). You cannot separate God's hatred of sin from his hatred of sinners. Every sinner outside Christ is under the wrath of God because God is holy. "*The froward is an abomination to the Lord*" (Prov. 3:32). "*The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord*" (Prov. 15:26). This gloriously holy God punishes sin. He must punish sin because he is holy. Blessed be his name, God does forgive sin! "*He delighteth in mercy!*" But, as stated above, God will not forgive sin at the expense of his holiness. He will not forgive sin without blood atonement (Heb. 9:22). **Because God is holy, acceptance with him on the ground of our own works is impossible** (Rom. 3:19-20). "A fallen creature could sooner create a world than produce that which would meet the approval of infinite purity" (A. W. Pink) (Isa. 64:6; Eph. 1:6). **Because God is holy, all who approach him must do so with reverence and godly fear.** He says, "*I will be sanctified of them that come nigh me, and before all the people will I be glorified*" (Lev. 10:3). (Ex. 3:5; Psa. 89:7; 99:5; Eccles. 5:1-2). **Because God is holy, we should desire to**

be like him (Heb. 12:14). *Stephen Charnock* wrote, “This is the prime way of honoring God. We do not so glorify God by elevated admirations, or eloquent expressions, or pompous services to him, as when we aspire to a conversing with him with unstained spirits, and live to him in living like him.” This perfection of holiness will be the glory of heaven (I John 3:2).

GOD REQUIRES ALL MEN AND WOMEN TO BE HOLY, EVEN AS HE IS HOLY. God who is “*glorious in holiness,*” demands holiness in us. He cannot and will not accept anything less than perfect, pure, flawless holiness. God will not accept sincerity, works of benevolence, repentance, sacrifices, moral reformation, or even faith as a substitute for holiness. God demands holiness (Matt. 5:20; Heb. 12:14; Lev. 11:44-45; 1 Pet. 1:16). God says, “*Walk before me, and be thou perfect*” (Gen. 17:1). The slightest deviation from perfect holiness ignites the fire of God’s wrath against his creatures. It was deviation from perfect holiness that: drove Lucifer from heaven, the angels into darkness, Adam from the Garden, and drives sinners into hell. Carefully consider these things. It will take something more than a walk down a church aisle, a few tears, a prayer, and a decision of your free-will to get you into heaven. If you would enter heaven’s glory and live forever with God, you must be as good as God. You must be perfectly holy! That means that salvation by the will of man, the works of man, or even the worship of man is an utter impossibility, because you cannot make yourself holy!

GOD ALONE CAN MAKE UNHOLY, SINFUL MEN AND WOMEN PERFECTLY HOLY. Holiness is more than moral reformation, purity of life, and uprightness of heart. Holiness is nothing less than the complete restoration of manhood to the image and likeness of God. Holiness is the complete, not partial, but complete conformity of man to the image of God in Christ.

Men talk about practical holiness, about living holy lives, and of being holy. And that is all right as long as you understand that

holiness is not something you produce. It is something God gives. Not even faith in Christ produces holiness. Faith receives holiness. Faith embraces holiness. Faith loves holiness. And faith seeks holiness. But faith cannot produce holiness. Holiness is the work of God alone.

The whole purpose of God in the scheme of redemption and grace is to make his people holy, perfectly holy, for the glory of his own great name. Salvation is neither more nor less than God taking that which is common and unclean and making it holy (Eph. 1:3-6; 5:25-27). There cannot be degrees of holiness. We are either holy or unholy. It is impossible to be partially holy. God makes his elect holy by three distinct works of grace: (1.) We have been made positionally holy before the Law of God in free justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21). (2.) We have been made experimentally holy in regeneration and sanctification by the imparting of Christ's nature to us (2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 3:4-9). We do not become more and more holy by our works in progressive sanctification. We grow in grace, but not in holiness. Our sanctification (holiness) is the free gift of God's grace in salvation (Heb. 10:10-14). (3.) And we shall be made absolutely holy in glorification by the miraculous conformity of our nature (body, soul, and spirit) to Christ in the resurrection (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 John 3:2).

THE SUPREME REVELATION OF GOD'S HOLINESS IS THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST (Rom. 3:24-26). Here, and here alone, *"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other"* (Psa. 85:10). When I see Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with my sin upon him, suffering the horrible wrath of God, without mercy, I see that God is indeed holy, so holy that he will not allow even his own darling Son to go unpunished when sin is imputed to him, so holy that he will sacrifice his only begotten, well-beloved Son to save sinners before he will sacrifice his character! No wonder the seraphim, looking upon the mercy-seat (The Old Testament Picture of Christ's Blood

Atonement) cried continually, *“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts!”*

EVERY SINNER WHO BELIEVES ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS PERFECTLY HOLY IN THE SIGHT OF GOD (Col. 2:9-10). Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, by faith in him, we fulfill all the law of God (Rom. 3:28). By faith in Christ we give what God demands from us, complete satisfaction for all our sins and perfect holiness. In Christ every believer stands before God’s holy law in perfect holiness by divine imputation (Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21), with a holy nature imparted to him in regeneration (2 Pet. 1:4), in hope of a holy life with Christ forever in eternal glory (1 John 3:2). As we behold the wonders of God’s salvation, let our hearts sing with Moses, *“Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”*

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #9

The Wisdom of God

Romans 16:27

We admire wisdom in men. We do not necessarily admire learning, education, or knowledge. But we do admire wisdom. We seek the counsel and advice of wise men. We take the reproof and correction of one who is wise and seek to profit by his wisdom. To do so is itself an act of wisdom. As we admire the attribute of wisdom in a man, we ought all the more to admire it in God. A wise God is worthy of admiration, worship, trust, and obedience.

Three times in the New Testament the Lord our God is called "*the only wise God*" (Rom. 16:27; I Tim. 1:17; Jude 25). Wisdom is more than knowledge. It is the proper and best use of knowledge. And the Lord our God, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, possesses all wisdom. He is "*the only wise God*" (Job 12:12-13; Dan. 2:20-21).

WISDOM IS AN ATTRIBUTE OF GOD. Like goodness, sovereignty, power, and holiness, wisdom is an attribute of God's perfect, infinite Being. God is wise, perfectly wise, supremely wise, and consummately wise. His wisdom should inspire our hearts with confidence in him and praise to him.

God is exclusively wise. That is to say, in comparison with him, no one else possesses any wisdom at all. God the Father is wise. God the Son is the embodiment of wisdom. And God the Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom. But in comparison with the wisdom possessed by the infinite God, no one else has any wisdom at all. The holy angels, though they are wise and holy creatures by God's design, when compared to him, are charged with folly (Job 4:18).

And man, though he would be wise and thinks himself wise, is as “a wild ass’s colt” before God. We have very little wisdom even in natural things and none in spiritual things by nature. If we attain any spiritual wisdom it is by the gift of God (2 Cor. 2:11-16). We are wise to do evil. But to do good, we have no knowledge. God alone is wise. Wisdom belongs to God exclusively.

God is all-wise. He possesses all wisdom regarding all things. And he is wise in all his glorious Being. Everything God is is wise. And everything he does reflects his wisdom. There is no defect or lack of wisdom in him with respect to anything. Men may be wise in some things and foolish in others. But God is wise in everything. No man is always wise. Sometimes the wisest of men say and do foolish things, but not God. Neither his Word nor his works can be charged with folly. There is not an unwise word in all the Volume of Inspiration. And there is not an unwise action in all his works. “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all” (Psa. 104:24).

God is essentially wise. Wisdom is his nature and essence. Wisdom is what God is. As God is Love, as God is Spirit, as God is Goodness, so God is Wisdom. Without wisdom, he would not be God. God is wisdom essentially and eternally. And his wisdom is underived. It is immutable wisdom. It never increases and never diminishes.

Moreover, God is the source and fountain of all wisdom. Whatever wisdom there is in the universe among angels and men it comes from God. He is the Author and Giver of wisdom. The angels of heaven get their wisdom from God. The great men of the earth get their wisdom from God. All the wisdom that Adam had in innocence, or his sons have in the earth, even all the wisdom that Solomon possessed and the wisdom of God’s elect in eternal glory, is wisdom given, bestowed and maintained by God. I repeat myself deliberately: Wisdom is the gift of God (James 1:5). Anyone who possesses any wisdom by which he is distinguished from others, be

it natural or spiritual, has his wisdom by the sovereign bestowment of the Almighty (1 Cor. 4:7). Whatever wisdom there is in any of us, God put it there. He who gives wisdom to the wise is the infinitely wise God. The wisdom of God is unsearchable. Its depth cannot be fathomed. It cannot be traced and found out to perfection (Rom. 11:33; Job 11:6-9; 28:12-23).

THE WISDOM OF GOD IS MANIFEST IN HIS WORKS.

Though God's wisdom cannot be found out to perfection, there are some glaring, bright, and shining, striking appearances of it which are edifying and comforting to consider. His wisdom is manifest in his counsels of old (Isa. 25:1). Usually, the wisest acts of men are the results of thoughtful deliberation and sober consultation. Therefore, God's eternal decrees are called "*his counsels of old.*" God did not need to deliberate or consult with anyone about what he would do. Yet his decrees and purposes, being fixed by the highest wisdom are called his "*counsels.*" Thus he condescends to speak to us mortals with puny brains in a way that we can understand! God, in his infinite understanding of all things, knew from eternity what is best to be done. And by wisdom he decreed it according to the good pleasure of his will. He appointed the end of all things and ordained the best means to accomplish that end. In predestination, he set the proper time for the accomplishment of all things and guarded his purpose against everything that might hinder its accomplishment. The end for which God ordained all things is his own glory (Prov. 16:4; Rom. 11:36). The beneficiaries of God's purposes and decrees are his own elect, whom he predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ in everlasting salvation (Eph. 1:5-6, 11; Rom. 9:23; 11:33-36). God's eternal purpose of grace in election and predestination is revealed for the glorifying of his grace in saving sinners (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). In order to accomplish his eternal purpose of grace, God has wisely ordained the time, season, place, and end of all things under the sun (Eccles. 3:1, 11, 14, 17).

Though there are many devices formed to overthrow God's purpose and thwart his decree, they are all vain. God not only disappoints the devices of the crafty, he uses their devices to accomplish his own wise designs (Psa. 76:10). His counsel will stand. And he will do all his pleasure (Isa. 46:10). The thoughts of his heart, his decrees, shall be performed unto all generations. He not only overthrows, but wisely and sovereignly uses the deeds of the wicked to accomplish his holy pleasure. The plot of satan to overthrow his dominion only served to accomplish his purpose (Isa. 14:14, 24, 26, 27). Adam's insurrection and fall was typical of and foreshadowed our salvation by Christ, the last Adam (Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). Joseph was sold into Egypt by his brothers who meant it for evil because God had ordained it for good (Gen. 50:19-20). Pharaoh hardened his heart against Israel and against God because the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he might glorify himself in Pharaoh's destruction and Israel's salvation (Rom. 9:17). Twelve times, the Bible specifically states that "*the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart*" (Ex. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:19, 32; 9:7, 12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). The kiss of Judas, the cowardice of Pilate, and even the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ was in exact accordance with God's wisdom and purpose of grace toward his people (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).

Even the failings and sins of his people. Had it not been for the incest of Tamar, the sin of Elimelech in going down to Moab which brought Boaz and Ruth together, and the sin of David in the matter of Uriah, the Lord Jesus Christ would never have been born into this world. His incarnation was, by the arrangement of providence, the direct result of these sad events. This fact does not, to any degree, lessen the offenses mentioned or charge the holy Lord God with complicity in them (James 1:13). But they do display God's great, infinite wisdom in arranging and controlling the affairs of the universe to accomplish his own gracious purposes.

The covenant of grace, from which all things spring, was a work of infinite wisdom (Heb. 8:10-12). It was wisdom in God that

devised such a covenant and moved him to make it ordered in all things and sure for the glory of the divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the everlasting salvation of his elect. It is a covenant stored with all the promises and blessings of grace (Tit. 1:2). It is a covenant that was made with Christ as the Surety of a chosen people (Heb. 7:22). Every blessing of the covenant, as well as every condition of it, was placed in Christ, put upon Christ, and fulfilled by Christ (Eph. 1:3; II Tim. 1:9). Thus did God in great, infinite wisdom find a ransom suitable and way honoring to himself to justify his elect (Job 33:24; Rom. 3:24-26).

God's works of creation are spectacular displays of undeniable wisdom (Psa. 104:24; 136:3-5; Prov. 3:19-20; Jer. 10:12). In the luminous heavens above - the sun, the moon, and the stars, the atmospheric heavens - the clouds, rain, snow, and seasons, and the earth with all its climates, vegetation, beasts, bodies of water, the human body are all wonders of God's wisdom (Psa. 139:14-17).

God's in providence is a constant manifestation of his wisdom (Rom. 8:28; 11:36). As we have already seen, God's providential rule is universal in its scope, detailed in its exercise, and saving in its end. In infinite wisdom he rules all things everywhere and at all times for the salvation of his people and the glory of his own great name.

Above all else the wisdom of God is revealed in the redemption and salvation of sinners by Christ (Eph. 1:7-8). Wisdom and prudence are displayed in other works of God. But all wisdom and prudence are displayed in the great works of grace by which we are saved. Behold the wisdom of God in...

1. The Person appointed to be our Redeemer - Christ (Job 33:24).
2. The means by which Christ came - The incarnation (Heb. 10:5-10).
3. The people God sent his Son to redeem (Rom. 5:6-10; I Cor. 1:26-31).

4. The method by which Christ accomplished our redemption - Substitution - Blood atonement (2 Cor. 5:21).
5. The method by which salvation is brought to sinners - Irresistible, effectual, almighty grace Rom. 9:16).

The wisdom of God shines forth brilliantly in the gospel, the good news of salvation by Christ (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:10). Christ is the gospel. And Christ is the wisdom of God (Prov. 8:12-31; 1 Cor. 1:24). The doctrine of the gospel - free justification, peace, pardon, and righteousness by Christ; the ordinances of the gospel - baptism and the Lord's supper; and the standing ministry of the gospel, all show forth the wisdom of our God as gifts of his free grace (Eph. 4:11-16). In wisdom he uses frail men, placing them where he wills for the salvation of his elect. His wisdom preserves his servants, his church, and his testimony in the world. And his wisdom makes his word to accomplish exactly what he pleases (Isa. 55:11).

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #10

The Will of God

Psalm 40:8

We know that the words of David in Psalm 40 find their ultimate and perfect fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ, because the Holy Spirit tells us so in Hebrews 10:7-9. How we rejoice to know that Christ, the God-man, our Substitute, has fulfilled all the will of God for us! By his obedience to God in our stead the Lord Jesus Christ obtained eternal redemption for us. His obedience to God is our righteousness. His blood is our atonement for sin. We are complete in Christ. And we are accepted in him, because he delighted to do the will of God as our Substitute.

But the words of our text were also David's words. They express the desire, ambition, and driving force of every believer's heart. *"I delight to do thy will, O God."* All who are born of God bear this distinct mark of grace in the likeness of Christ. Believers in their inmost souls delight to do the will of God. Our joy and happiness is not merely in receiving good from God, but in rendering active service to God. We desire to obey and serve our heavenly Father in all things and do his will at all times, not reluctantly, but cheerfully. God's will is our joy and delight. And we delight to see God's will done in and by others. Our heart's prayer is, *"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven"* (Matt. 6:9-10). God the Holy Spirit has taught every believer in the world to pray with Christ, *"Thy will be done."*

Were it possible to gather all the desires, ambitions, aspirations, goals, and prayers of all God's saints in heaven and earth into one expression, it would be this: *"Thy will be done."* Every

believer delights to do the will of God! When the believing heart cries, *“I delight to do thy will, O God,”* The meaning is: My heavenly Father, my God, in my heart of hearts, from the depths of my inmost soul,...

- I delight to fulfill your will of purpose.
- I delight to satisfy your will of pleasure.
- And I delight to obey your will of precept.

Our heavenly Father, the God of the Bible, is a God *“who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will”* (Eph. 1:11). And all who know him delight to do his will in all things.

IT IS THE DUTY AND RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN TO OBEY THE WILL OF GOD REVEALED IN HIS PRECEPTS. The Bible reveals God’s will to be made up of three parts, his precept, his pleasure, and his purpose. His precept is that which he requires and commands of his creatures. His pleasure is that in which he delights and that of which he approves. His purpose is that which he is determined to accomplish. These three things never contradict each other. They are never at odds. They are always in perfect harmony. They are, together, the will of God. Let’s look at them one at a time, beginning with God’s will of precept. This is his revealed will, that which he requires of men, that which he commands us to do. When a person in authority expresses his will to those under his authority, his revealed will is to them a law, a command, a precept, which they are responsible to obey. And that which God has revealed to be his will and pleasure is to us a precept, a law, a command which we are responsible to obey. God’s will of command, or precept, made known to us, is our rule of duty (Eccles. 12:13; Ex. 20; Rom. 2:12-15, 18; Psa. 143:1). In the day of judgment God will judge every man by that which has been revealed to him. **The moral requirements of God’s law are revealed to all men by the light of nature** (Rom. 2:12-15). As the wisdom and power of God are stamped upon creation, so the law of God is stamped upon the conscience of man by nature. Even the most heathen, barbaric tribesmen of ancient cultures, know that God is and that he requires

man to love him supremely and to love his neighbor as himself. **God revealed his will upon Sinai in the giving of the law** (Ex. 20:1-17; Rom. 13:8-9; Eph. 6:2). The decalogue, the moral law, reveals what God requires of all men in their relations of men to him and to one another. Though in Christ we are free from the yoke of the law's rule and its curse, these requirements are never altered. The ceremonial law given to the nation of Israel was God's revealed will concerning worship in the Old Testament. It began when God commanded Israel to observe the Passover (Ex. 12) and ended when Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us, when the hand writing of the ordinances was nailed to the cross (1 Cor. 5:7; Col. 2:14-16). **Since Christ has come and fulfilled all the requirements and types of the moral and ceremonial law, the revealed will of God to all men is the gospel of Christ as it is written out in the whole Volume of Holy Scripture** (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Because no man is capable of fulfilling the righteousness of God revealed in the law, Christ fulfilled the law in the place of sinful men. God's elect, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, fulfill the righteousness of the law by faith in him (Rom. 8:2-4; 3:31). This is what God requires and commands of all men - *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ* (I John 3:23). Faith in Christ is the revealed will of God. This is God's precept. And all men are responsible to obey it (John 3:36). In this sense, our renewed hearts say, *"I delight to do thy will, O God."*

IT IS THE DESIRE OF EVERY BELIEVER TO OBEY THE WILL OF GOD'S HOLY PLEASURE. A loving child wants more than to avoid his father's disapproval. He seeks to know and do that which is his father's pleasure. A loving wife wants more than to do what her husband requires. She wants to please her husband in all things. And the believer wants something infinitely greater than to avoid the wrath of God. He wants to do the will of God. He wants to do that which gives pleasure, satisfaction, and delight to his heavenly Father. I know that we cannot add to God's infinite pleasure; but his children earnestly seek to do that which he declares to be his pleasure.

There are some things revealed in the Bible that please God (Mic. 6:6-8). God declares himself to be pleased with other men in justice (honesty), mercy, and love, and walk humbly before him. To walk humbly before God is to walk before him in faith, trusting Christ alone as our ground of acceptance with him. (Read 1 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 5:18-21; Phil. 2:1-4; and Heb. 11:5-6.) Just as there are some things that please him, there are some things revealed in the Scriptures that are displeasing and grievous to our Lord (Eph. 4:17-5:1). It ought to be our constant prayer that our God will give us grace that we may not dishonor his name or offend him in thought, word, or deed, that he will give us grace that we may not grieve your Holy Spirit. It has already been stated, but it needs to be emphasized that the only way sinful men and women can please God is by faith in Christ (Heb. 11:5-6). Enoch was not a *supersaint*, but simply a sinner saved by grace, a man who pleased God because he trusted the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the only way we can please him. God is pleased with his Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). He is pleased with us in his Son (Eph. 1:6). And he is pleased with our feeble efforts to please him for his Son's sake (1 Pet. 2:5). In this sense too, regarding the will of God's holy pleasure, we say, "*I delight to do thy will, O God.*"

WE ARE ASSURED IN THE BIBLE THAT ALL THINGS OBEY THE SECRET WILL OF GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE (Deut. 29:29). God has purposed, or decreed, all things that ever have come to pass and all things that ever shall come to pass, without exception (Psa. 115:3; 135:6; Isa. 46:10; Dan. 4:35; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 13:48; Rom. 8:28-30; 9:15-18; I Cor. 5:18; Eph. 1:11). In this sense everything that is, has been, or shall be is the will of God. God is absolutely sovereign in directing the affairs of the universe. His will of purpose includes all things, evil as well as good, sin as well as salvation, error as well as truth. And God's will of purpose is always, perfectly accomplished in and by all things. With regard to God's will of purpose we must understand that **God wills whatever he does in providence** (Job 23:13; Eph. 1:11). He

acts voluntarily in all that he does. He is never compelled to do anything. **God does in providence exactly he willed to do from eternity** (Acts 15:18). If he could will, desire, or purpose to do anything that he failed to accomplish, he would not be omnipotent. **God's will of purpose includes all things** (Psa. 76:10; Prov. 16:4). It is his eternal, immutable, sovereign, unconditional, and irresistibly effectual will, ever holy, wise, and good.

Because carnal men are ever bent upon perverting the things of God, I must give a word or two of caution regarding the will of God's purpose. The sovereignty of God's purpose does not destroy man's responsibility, or even his will. Man's sin has put his will in bondage to sin, not by God's purpose. The universality of God's purpose does not make God the author of sin (Jas. 1:13). God is not the author of sin; but he is the author of the good which he accomplishes by overruling sin. Without question, Adam's fall was ordained of God; but God did not force Adam to do what he did. Yet, he used the fall to accomplish his good pleasure toward his elect for the glory of his own great name (1 Cor. 15:21-22). The Lord God certainly ordained the crucifixion of his Son in the place of his people (Acts 2:23). Yet, he did not compel men to crucify him. He simply overruled their wicked deeds to accomplish his purpose, which is the salvation of his elect for the everlasting praise of his name.

When we hear God say regarding all things, "*I will do all my pleasure,*" we rejoice to bow before him and say, "*Thy will be done,*" "*I delight to do thy will, O God.*" Yet, among God's saints two questions are commonly asked in sincerity when thinking about or discussing God's will.

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A BELIEVER TO MISS, OR BE OUT OF, THE WILL OF GOD? Without question, insofar as God's revealed will, his precept, and his pleasure is concerned, a believer can miss, disobey, and be out of the will of God. Any act of sin, unbelief, and disobedience to the revealed will in Holy Scripture, or any act, movement, or decision contrary to the direction of the Holy Spirit is to miss and be out of the will of God. David was

clearly out of the will of God when the Lord made a breach upon Israel in 1 Chronicles 13. However, let it be understood and emphatically clear that no one, and no action performed by anyone, is ever out of the will of God's purpose! *"He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."* Though Elimelech disobeyed God's revealed will when he went down to Moab, it was God's eternal purpose to fetch Ruth from Moab to be a bride to Boaz, that he might bring his Son into the world through them (Ruth 4:13-17; Matt. 1:5). Without question, David was out of God's will in the matter of Uriah. "The thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (2 Sam. 11:27). Yet, our God is so absolutely sovereign and gracious that he overruled and used even David's sin with Bathsheba to bring David's Redeemer and ours into this world (Matt. 1:6). Recognizing something of the greatness and goodness of his will, I am compelled and thankful to say, even when it is contrary to my will, my choice, and my actions, *"I delight to do thy will, O God."*

HOW CAN I KNOW THE WILL OF GOD? This is a question that I hear wherever I go. It is a question I have asked many times myself. It is a question we have to deal with day by day. With Moses, we ought to pray, "Show me now thy way" (Ex. 33:13). No one can determine what God's will for you is, except you. In this matter, you must not consult with flesh and blood, but with God alone. He God will reveal his will to you by his Word, by his Spirit, and by his providence. This is a matter of certainty - **God will reveal his will to all who truly seek his will in faith** (Prov. 3:5-6). Let this be our prayer - *"Thy will be done!"* Let this be our determination - *"I delight to do thy will, O God."* Let this be our attitude - *"It is the Lord, let him do what he will."*

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #11

The Purpose of God

Romans 8:28

Is the world in which we live ruled by blind fate, or uncontrolled luck, or the twists of evolutionary progress, or is it ruled by almighty God? Are the events of our lives ordered by the wise, holy, and good purpose of our heavenly Father, or are they the results of mere coincidences, without purpose and arrangement? Is the will of God supreme, or is the will of God subject to and dependent upon his creation? What does God say in his Word? No other opinion matters. By this standard every preacher, every doctrine, every message, and every statement on spiritual matters must be examined. *“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them”* (Isa. 8:20). This is what God says: *“All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”* The God of the Bible, the God we trust and worship, the one true and living God is a God of purpose. The whole universe and all the events of time are completely subject to, absolutely ruled by, and ultimately disposed of *“according to his purpose.”* God did not create the world and place man upon it and then withdraw from it, leaving his creation to the uncontrolled direction of fate, luck, or free-will. God almighty determined, purposed, decreed, and unalterably fixed all the circumstances and events in the lot of every individual, and everything which makes up the history of the universe from the beginning of time to the end of time; and he did so from eternity. “He did not merely decree that general laws should be established for the government of the world, but he settled the application of those laws to all particular cases. Our days are numbered, and so are the hairs of our heads. We may learn what are the extent of the

divine decrees from the dispensation of providence in which they are executed. The care of providence reaches to the most insignificant creatures, and the most minute events - the death of a sparrow, the fall of a hair" (A. W. Pink).

DOES THE BIBLE TEACH THAT GOD HAS A PURPOSE?

The basis of our faith is the Word of God alone. Does the Bible teach that God has a purpose by which he sovereignly rules the world? Read the following passages, and learn what God himself has to say about this issue: Isaiah 14:24, 26, 27; 46:9-11; Jeremiah 51:29; Romans 8:28; 9:11-24; 11:33-36; Ephesians 1:9; 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 John 3:8. These passages of Holy Scripture unquestionably declare that God almighty has a purpose which he purposed in himself before the world began by which he sovereignly rules the world. God's very nature teaches us that he has such a purpose. It would be contrary to the perfections of his nature not to have a purpose by which he governs the universe. To deny his purpose, to deny his sovereign work of eternal predestination, is to deny his very Godhead. This is the reason I have included this study in this series on the attributes of God. **If God is sovereign over all his creatures, then everything that comes to pass in time must have been purposed from eternity.** If anything comes to pass without the will of God, or contrary to his eternal command, purpose, and decree of predestination, he cannot be the sovereign God who does according to his will in heaven and earth and works all things after the counsel of his own will (Lam. 3:37; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11). If anything that comes to pass is the result of fate, fortune, or free-will, and independent of the will of God, how can he be sovereign? If God's works are subservient to, dependent upon, or measured by the will and works of his creatures, then the Creator is dependent upon the creature! If God is not a God of sovereign purpose, how can it be truthfully said that *"of him, through him, and to him are all things"*? (Rom. 11:36). **If the God of heaven is immutable, then he must be a God who has an eternal, immutable purpose.** If something happens in time that he did not purpose in eternity, then it must be new to him. It

must produce some change in him. And what he does with, or in response to that new thing implies either an addition to or an alteration of his purpose. But that cannot be, for he declares, "*I change not*" (Mal. 3:6). With him there is "*no variableness, neither shadow of turning*" (James 1:17). **Again, if God is not a God of purpose, then he is not a God of knowledge and wisdom as the Bible declares himself to be.** All knowledge belongs to God. He is "*a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed*" (II Sam. 2:13). God has an exact knowledge of all things done in time. And his knowledge is from eternity (Acts 15:18). He knew from eternity both what he would do himself and what he would allow others to do. Nothing takes God by surprise. His knowledge of all things is founded upon his purpose regarding all things. He knows all things because he purposed, determined, and predestined all things. Many would destroy the teachings of the Scripture regarding predestination by asserting that God foreknew all things, but that he did not purpose, will, decree, and predestinate all things. But their doctrine has no strength. If God knows all things from eternity, he either approves of them or disapproves of them; he is either willing that they come to pass or he is not. If he is willing that they come to pass, then he has purposed it from eternity. If he is not willing, and they come to pass against his will, then he is not God! Not only does God know all things, he is the only wise God, and his wisdom implies a plan and purpose regarding all things in his creation (Isa. 28:29). Even the plowing of the farmer and the breaking of the clods of the earth is according to the wonderful counsel and excellent working of our God. Get this blessed fact of divine revelation firmly settled in your heart - The God of the Bible has a sovereign, eternal purpose by which he rules the universe.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GOD? When an architect draws a set of blueprints, those blueprints are the revelation of his purpose. It is obvious that his purpose includes a great multitude of things, from the size, shape, place, and usefulness of every nail and screw to the final form of the structure to be erected. But if you want to know the purpose he has in mind, you need only to look at

the picture on the first page. Without question, God's purpose includes everything, as I intend to show. But if you want to know what his purpose is in all things, you need only to look at the picture he has given. **God's great and glorious purpose in all things, the purpose according to which he rules the universe, is twofold.** *First*, and foremost, the purpose of God in all things is the glory of his own great name. All things in creation and providence are for the glory of God (Rev. 4:11). And all the works of God's grace, election, predestination, adoption, redemption, regeneration, and preservation, are for the glory of God (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). *Second*, the great purpose of God in all things is the salvation of his own elect (Rom. 8:28-39; II Tim. 1:9). God has determined to glorify himself, and he has chosen to do so in the highest possible degree by saving sinners through the blood and righteousness of his dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. **In order to accomplish this great end, almighty God has purposed all that ever comes to pass in time** (Prov. 16:4; Psa. 76:10). Even the black tar with which the foundation of a house is painted is included in the plans of the architect and serves a useful purpose in the structure of the house.

WHAT IS THE EXTENT OF GOD'S PURPOSE? Few would deny that God has a purpose. But most greatly limit God's purpose. In doing so they would both limit God and his sovereignty. But the Bible does not limit the purpose of God at all. According to the Scriptures, the purpose of God reaches "to all things that come to pass in the world, from the beginning to the end of it. The world, and all things in it, were created by and according to the will and pleasure of God, Rev. 4:11" (John Gill). **The heavens** - Their creation, the time of their duration, their dissolving, and the new heavens to be made are fixed by the decree of almighty God (Psa. 148:6). **The earth** - Its size and form, before and after the flood, its times and seasons, and the day and hour of its destruction, was set and determined by the word of God's purpose from eternity (2 Pet. 3:5, 6, 7, 10). **The seas** - Their place, their depth, their boundaries, beyond which they cannot pass are fixed by God's unalterable

purpose (Job 28:10-11; Prov. 8:29; Jer. 5:21). **The rain** - Has its decree as well. Whether it is given in mercy to make the fields fruitful, or withheld in drought in any place, or poured out in a flood of judgment is according to the eternal decree of God almighty (Job 28:26; Amos 4:7-9; 5:8). **The people of the world** - Their races, nations, and kingdoms, their habitations, color, and dialect, their abilities and infirmities, their days and years, are determined by God our Creator (Deut. 32:8; Dan. 2:38-44; 4:17-20). **The church of God** - Her dispensations, her trials, her persecutions, her deliverances, her times of languishing and her times of refreshing, her days on earth and her everlasting glory were determined before the world was made by the purpose of God (Rev. 10:6; 11:2-3; 12:14; 13:5; Psa. 102:13; Isa. 60:1-22; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 5:25-27). **“Everything** respecting all the individuals of the world, that have been, are, or shall be, all correspond with the decrees of God and are according to them. Men’s coming into the world, the time of it, and all the circumstances attending it - all the events and occurrences they meet with throughout the whole time of life - their places of habitation, their station, calling, and employment - their circumstances of riches and poverty, of health and sickness, adversity and prosperity - their time of going out of the world, with everything attending that - all are according to the determinate counsel and will of God” (John Gill). (Eccles. 3:1-2; 7:14; Acts 27:26; Job 14:5). **The purpose of God extends to and includes everything (spiritual, temporal, and eternal) relating to his elect in time and eternity** (2 Cor. 5:18). **God’s purpose determined everything that Christ was to be, do, suffer, and accomplish as our Substitute** (Lk. 22:22, 37; Acts 2:23; 4:28; Gal. 4:4-6). His incarnation and birth, his life and family, his sorrows and temptations, his betrayal and death, his ascension and exaltation, his heavenly glory and second coming, all were determined by God’s sovereign, eternal, immutable purpose. **The purpose of God determined even the most insignificant events of the world** (Matt. 10:29-30). What can be less significant than the falling of a sparrow or the numbering of our hairs? Yet even these were arranged by our God from everlasting. Everything that ever comes

to pass in this world, from its beginning to its end, was unalterably fixed and determined by the purpose of God in eternity. Whatever comes to pass in time, without exception was foreordained from eternity. "God's decree, as comprehensive as his government, extends to all creatures and events" (A. W. Pink). **The purpose of God even extends to wicked men and their wicked deeds** (Psa. 76:10; Prov. 16:4; Acts 2:23;13:27-29). I do not suggest, or in any way imply, that God is the author and cause of sin. But I do declare, in complete accordance with Holy Scripture, that God is the Orderer and Controller of sin and evil. Sin, satan, and sinners could not exist without God's permission and purpose.

IS THE PURPOSE OF GOD SURE? Most assuredly it shall! God's purpose has always been accomplished perfectly. God's purpose is being accomplished perfectly. And God's purpose shall be accomplished perfectly in and with all things. The purpose and decree of almighty God cannot fail (Isa. 14:27). It is, in all things, infallible and effectual, because it is an eternal purpose (Eph. 1:4; 3:11), an unconditional purpose (Rom. 9:11-18), a wise purpose (Rom. 11:33; Eph. 1:11), a free purpose (Isa. 40:13-14), and an immutable purpose (Heb. 6:17).

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE WHETHER OR NOT WE BELIEVE IN THE PURPOSE OF GOD? Imagine, if you dare, what the religious leaders of the world would have us believe - A God without a sure and certain purpose that must be accomplished - A world in which nothing is certain - A universe without design - A planet which spins by chance - Events determined by luck - Wicked men without any governor but their own freewill - Demons without restraint but by their own determination - A future without certainty! In such a universe there could be no peace, comfort, or assurance. There would be no place of refuge in time of trouble. There could be no faith and hope in God, in his promises. in his power, or in his prophecies. No word from God could be believed absolutely. He cannot be trusted absolutely who does not control absolutely. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God that everything in the universe is

determined and controlled by his infinite wisdom, immutable purpose, and sovereign goodness. We worship, love, and trust a God of purpose (Rom. 8:28; 11:36).

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #12

The Faithfulness Of God

1 Corinthians 10:13

Faithfulness is a rare thing in this world. In the business world, with rare exceptions, a man's word is no longer his bond. In the social world, marital infidelity has become something that is expected. The sacred bonds of matrimony, these days, are discarded as thoughtlessly as wastepaper. In the political world, elected representatives, with very rare exceptions, use their public offices for nothing but personal advantage. And in the religious world, the vast majority of churches, preachers, and religious leaders who claim to serve God, uphold his Word and proclaim his truth, repudiate the character of God, deny the Word of God, and openly attack the truth of God. Faithfulness is a rare thing in this world.

Even among the saints of God and among his most faithful servants there is great unfaithfulness! How unfaithful we have been to Christ! How unfaithful we have been to the light, privileges, and responsibilities God has given us! Our faithfulness to our God, at best, is unfaithfulness! But, *"God is faithful!"* How refreshing, how blessed it is to lift our eyes above the world, and above ourselves, to behold One who is faithful, faithful at all times, faithful in all things!

The Lord our God is faithful, always faithful, in all things faithful. Our many trials and temptations in this world would cause us to sink in utter despair, were it not for the blessed fact revealed in 1 Corinthians 10:13: *"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."

Faithfulness is an attribute essential to God, without which he would not be God. It is a most glorious attribute of his nature. *"Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him"* (Deut. 7:9). God's faithfulness is, like himself, great and infinite. Jeremiah said, *"Great is thy faithfulness"* (Lam. 3:23). Faithfulness is all around him, like a garment with which he is clothed and covered from head to foot. *"O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? Or to thy faithfulness round about thee?"* (Psa. 89:8). God's faithfulness is immutable, invariable, unchanging and unchangeable. It has never failed and shall never fail. It is established in the heavens and will continue forever (Psa. 89:2, 23, 33; 119:90). *"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself"* (II Tim. 2:13). Do you understand this? It is utterly impossible for God to be unfaithful!

God's faithfulness is the foundation of our trust and confidence in him. He never forgets, never fails, never falters, never forsakes, never forfeits his Word. Therefore, we may safely and confidently commit ourselves to him and depend upon him for all the mercies he has promised, both in this life and in the life to come (I Pet. 4:19; I Thess. 5:23-24). The faithfulness of God is seen, primarily, in the fact that he always performs his Word (Num. 23:19). *"The foundation of God standeth sure"* (2 Tim. 2:19). And *"there shall be a performance of those things which were told (us) from the Lord"* (Lk. 1:45).

ILLUSTRATIONS OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS ARE FOUND THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE. When he brought Noah and his family out of the ark, the Lord God made a promise: *"While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease"* (Gen. 8:22). Every year furnishes a fresh witness to God's faithfulness to his

promise. He promised that he would never destroy the earth with the waters of a flood again. And he set the rainbow in the sky to remind us of his faithfulness to his promise (Gen. 9:8-15).

In Genesis 15:13-16, God told Abraham that his seed would serve as strangers in a hostile land for four hundred years, and afterwards come out with great substance. As the centuries ran their course, Abraham's descendants groaned beneath the load of their bitter affliction in Egypt. Had God forgotten his promise? Had God forgotten to be faithful? Not at all - *"It came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt"* (Ex. 12:41).

In the days of the kings of Israel the Prophet Isaiah gave this word of promise from God - *"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel"* (Isa. 7:14). Hundreds of years came and went. But *"when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law"* (Gal. 4:4-5).

And of Christ it was prophesied, *"Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins"* (Isa. 11:5). When Christ came he faithfully fulfilled all the stipulations of his covenant with the Father as our Mediator and Surety. He ascended back into heaven. And there he took his place upon the throne of glory as the God-man, whose name is *"Faithful and True!"*

GOD IS ALWAYS FAITHFUL TO HIS COVENANT (Isa. 54:9-10). Sometimes it appears that God's covenant has been broken, nullified, and destroyed. But it never has been, nor can it ever be broken, because the covenant of God's grace and peace is not in any way dependent upon man. It is a covenant made between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit before the world began. It is a covenant depending not upon the faithfulness of man, but upon the faithfulness of God.

God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has been faithful in his obedience to the Father, as our Surety and Covenant Head (Psa. 40:6-8; Isa. 50:5-7). In order for the holy Lord God to save his elect people certain requirements and stipulations had to be met for us. We could not meet them. But Christ met them for us, as our Representative, and by his obedience unto death we are saved. God required perfect obedience to his law for righteousness to be brought in, the complete satisfaction for his justice for the atonement of our sins, and the restoration of manhood to perfect holiness. Christ agreed to do it, became responsible to do it, and has done it. That is what Paul means when he says, "*Christ hath redeemed us!*" That is what our Savior meant when he said, "*It is finished!*"

God the Father has faithfully given our Mediator the reward of his obedience (Phil. 2:9-11). He has been exalted and glorified as a man (John 17:2-4). He has been given seed to serve him forever (Psa. 2:8; John 17:9, 20, 24). God the Father gave him pre-eminence in all things and over all things as our Mediator and Surety (Col. 1:18; Heb. 1:1-3).

God the Holy Spirit faithfully fulfills his work in the covenant, in the fulness of time, by bringing every elect, redeemed sinner in the world into the kingdom of grace, graciously causing each one to receive the adoption of sons to which they were predestined from eternity (Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:5; 1 John 3:1-3). The salvation of sinners is a matter of divine faithfulness, the faithfulness of the triune God to his own purpose of grace and to his Son. Every blessing of the covenant of grace we have received and shall yet receive is a matter of God's immutable faithfulness to his covenant (Psa. 89:19-37). There is not one blessing in the covenant that shall not be bestowed upon God's elect (Eph. 1:3-14). Our redemption by the blood of Christ, our regeneration, and the faith God has given us are all the result of God's faithfulness to his purpose of grace and love toward us in eternal election (Jer. 31:3; 1 John 1:9). Forgiveness, justification,

acceptance, adoption, preservation, and glorification are all matters of God's covenant faithfulness to his people (II Sam. 23:5).

GOD IS FAITHFUL IN ALL HIS WORD (Psa. 119:138). Let men mock, deride, and blaspheme the Book of God as they may, the Word of God, in its entirety, is truth and faithfulness. Its doctrines are all true. Its promises are all faithful. Its threatenings are all sure. Not one word of God shall fall to the ground. Everything that he has spoken shall come to pass exactly according to his own unalterable purpose.

GOD IS FAITHFUL IN ALL HIS RELATIONS TO AND WORKS FOR HIS COVENANT PEOPLE. May he be pleased graciously to convince us of this blessed truth, which is essential to his very Being: *"God is faithful."* He may be safely trusted. We may safely rely upon him. No one has ever trusted him in vain. May he give us grace to believe him, to lean upon him completely and alone for everything. We often make the same mistake Jeremiah did. We judge God's faithfulness by our circumstances and experiences. We ought to judge our circumstances and experiences by his faithfulness, as the prophet learned to do (Lam. 3:1-40). **God is faithful in all the dispositions of his providence** (Rom. 8:28). Everything that comes to pass is brought to pass by his hand for the everlasting, spiritual good of chosen sinners. **He is faithful in disciplining his erring, sinful children** (Heb. 12:5-11). Our heavenly Father never afflicts without a reason. He never causes his child a needless tear. When he afflicts us, he afflicts us in faithfulness (Psa. 119:65, 67, 68, 71, 75). He knows that our afflictions are necessary to drive us away from sin and to teach us to seek him. He says, *"In their afflictions they will seek me early"* (Hos. 5:15).

"God in Israel sows the seeds
Of afflictions, pain, and toil -
These spring up and choke the weeds
That would else o'er spread the soil."

He is faithful in the preservation of his elect (I Cor. 1:;9; Phil. 1:6). When we are tempted, he is faithful to keep us (I Cor. 10:13). When we fall, he is faithful both to restore us and to forgive us (Psa. 37:24; I John 1:9). Though often by word and by deed we deny him, yet he cannot deny himself, *“God is faithful.” “He abideth faithful!”* (II Tim. 2:13). God’s elect are absolutely, infallibly secure in Christ. Our security is not based upon the strength of our resolutions or ability to persevere, but upon the veracity and faithfulness of God. **And God is faithful in glorifying his people** (Jude 24-25). He who gave us grace will give us glory too (Psa. 84:11; 1 Thess. 5:23-24). He who loved us, predestinated us to life, redeemed us by blood, and called us by grace, will glorify us in the end (II Tim. 1:12). If we truly believe that *God is faithful,* we should cease to murmur against his providence, cast our every care upon him and cease from worry and care. Let us pray for grace to honor him by implicit confidence and faith and to be faithful to him in all things.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #13

The Love Of God

Romans 8:39

In Romans 8 the Apostle Paul is laying the foundation for the believer's confidence and assurance of faith. The basis of our assurance, as it is set forth in this chapter is the purpose of God, the providence of God, and the propitiatory sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Resting the weight of his immortal soul upon these solid pillars of faith, Paul declares, *"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."*

Whenever we think about the love of God we must begin here. The love of God is in Christ. We rejoice to know that *"God is love."* Love is in God. Love comes from God. Apart from God there is no love. But the love of God is revealed, expressed, known, manifest, and found only in Christ. The Bible never speaks of the love of God outside of, or apart from Christ. Those who talk of the love of God toward sinners apart from Christ, the Mediator between God and men, speak in direct opposition to the Scriptures.

"The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Psa. 145:9). Because of his goodness and tender mercy, God feeds the raven, clothes the lily, and sustains the beasts of the field. He is kind even to the thankless reprobate in this world (Lk. 6:35). His providence extends to all his creatures. And he sends both sunshine and rain to the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). But the love of God is in Christ. It is reserved for and given to his elect in Christ.

Those who declare that God loves all people alike, that he loves those who perish under his wrath in hell just as he loves those who are the heirs of eternal life, reduce the love of God to a fickle, helpless, frustrated passion. But that cannot be. God's love is like himself, from everlasting to everlasting, immutable and unchanging. "Nothing is more absurd than to imagine that anyone beloved of God can eternally perish or shall ever experience his everlasting vengeance" (A. W. Pink).

When Paul says, nothing "*shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ,*" the word "*us*" refers to God's elect, those sinners who are actually saved by his grace. When false prophets declare that God loves everyone in the world, they speak contrary to the Scriptures and give sinners a false hope, crying "*peace, peace,*" when there is no peace. The Word of God plainly declares that God does not love all people (Psa. 5:5; 11:6-7; John 3:36; Rom. 9:13). Noah's generation, the inhabitants of Sodom, Pharaoh and the Egyptian army, and the sons of Korah all stand as monuments to the fact that some in this world are not loved of God. If the Lord's treatment of those people is an evidence of love, we might well pray to be saved from such *love*! The fact is, God's love is specifically and distinctively toward his elect alone. Is that not what he asserts in Isaiah 43:3-4?³ To tell sinners that God loves them regardless of their relationship to Christ is either an assurance of salvation without Christ, or a declaration that God is weak, mutable, helpless, and frustrated.

We cannot understand or appreciate the love of God unless we begin here. The love of God is in Christ. As all the grace, all the promises, and all the blessings of God are in Christ, so the love of God is in Christ. As we were chosen of God in Christ (Eph. 1:4), as we are accepted of God in Christ (Eph. 1:6), as our life is hid with

³ The word "world" in John 3:16 is used to refer to God's elect among the Gentiles. It no more implies that God loves every person in the world than its use in Luke 2:1 implies that everyone in the world was taxed by Caesar.

God in Christ (Col. 3:3), so we are loved of God in Christ. Because the love of God toward us is *“the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,”* our Head, our Husband, our Mediator, nothing can separate us from that love; for nothing can separate us from Christ. Nothing can be more profitable to our souls than for us to meditate upon and spiritually contemplate *“the love of God which is in Christ.”* If we are enabled to do so by the Spirit of God, as we are lifted outside of ourselves and lifted above this world of care, our souls will be filled with satisfaction in the love of God. To know and to believe the love which God has toward us is both an earnest and a foretaste of heaven. In this study I want to lead your heart in meditating upon the love of God. In doing so, I will just give you an outline for direction, and leave it to you to fill in the spaces as you are taught by God the Holy Spirit.

First, we should be aware of some of **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD’S LOVE**, as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures. Much more needs to be said than can be said in this study; but here are three things revealed in the Bible about *“the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* **The love of God is free and unconditional.** (Hos. 14:4) God’s love toward us is an unconditional, unqualified, unmerited, uncaused love. God does not love his elect because of anything amiable and attractive in us. He says, *“Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated,”* and that before either had done anything good or bad, *“that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth”* (Rom. 9:13, 11). Our love to God is not the cause of his love to us, but the response of our hearts to his love revealed in us (I John 4:10, 19). God loved us when we were lost and ruined in sin, destitute of all grace, without the least particle of love toward him or faith in him. While we were yet his enemies and alienated from him, God loved us freely (Rom. 5:8, 10). Not even the death of Christ is the cause of God’s love for us. Christ’s death is the cause of our pardon and justification. Christ’s death is the cause of our redemption and salvation. But our Lord’s death on our behalf is not

the cause of God's love for us - It was the result of God's love (John 3:16). God so loved us that he gave his Son to die for us!

The love of God is eternal. As God's love is without a cause, so it is without beginning. *"The love of God which is in Christ"* is not of yesterday. It did not begin in time. It bears the date of eternity upon it. He declares, *"I have loved thee with an everlasting love"* (Jer. 31). Try to realize this, if you can - As God the Father loved his Son from eternity, so he loved us from eternity. And as God's love is in Christ, his love for Christ and his love for us are the same! (Read John 17:23). As he beholds his people in his dear Son, he loves us as he loves his Son, delights in us as he delights in his Son, and is pleased with us as he is pleased with his Son.

And the love of God is immutable, irrevocable, and indestructible. God's love is not like man's love. God's love does not change, ever, under any conditions. Having loved us, he will never call his love back. And there is nothing we can do to destroy or even lessen *"the love of God which is in Christ"* (John 13:1). We did nothing to attract God's love in the beginning. And we can do nothing to repel his love. God's love is not dependent upon or regulated by our faithfulness. God's love is immutable (Mal. 3:6).

Second, we should always hold in reverent, grateful memory **THE OPERATIONS OF GOD'S LOVE.** All the acts of God for his people in time are expressions of his love for us from everlasting. His acts of grace are the shedding abroad of his love in our hearts. **The very first act of God's love, as it is revealed in the Bible, is election and predestination** (Eph. 1:3-6; 2 Thess. 2:13; Deut. 7:7-9). No one believes in the love of God who does not believe in election. No one can talk about the love of God in Bible terms who does not talk about predestination.

The love of God is revealed in the redemption of our souls by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:8; 1 John

4:10; 3:16). We read the love of God in the precious blood of Christ. We see the love of God revealed not in the incarnation of Christ, not in the life of Christ, not in the example of Christ, not in the doctrine of Christ, not even in the prayers of Christ, but only in the blood of Christ. Had he done everything else and left this undone, had he not poured out his life's blood unto death for the atonement of our sins and the redemption of our souls, we could never have known the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. When God would show his power, he made the world. When he would display his wisdom, he set his creation in the frame of the vast universe which he had made. When he would manifest his greatness, he made the heavens above and put angels, principalities, and powers there to surround his throne. But when God would reveal his love he gave his Son to suffer, bleed, and die to put away the sins of his people and bring in everlasting righteousness. No wonder that Paul, when realizing this, cried, *"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* (Gal. 6:14). No wonder he made this the constant theme of his preaching, saying, *"I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2).

The new birth, by which we have been born into the family and kingdom of God, is the result of God's love toward us from eternity. Every elect, redeemed sinner is regenerated in the time of love (Ezek. 16:6-8), called to faith in Christ because of God's everlasting love (Jer. 31:3), and caused to receive the adoption of grace as the result of that love (Gal. 4:6; 1 John 3:1).

Our preservation in grace is also the work of God's love (John 13:1). *"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drawn it"* (Song of Sol. 8:7). God's love toward his elect is invincible and unquenchable. There is no possibility that it will expire. The black waters of our sin cannot extinguish it. The floods of our unbelief cannot draw it. With men, nothing is stronger than death. But with God nothing is stronger than love. You can

measure the strength of God's love when you can comprehend the obstacles his love has overcome. Our fall in Adam could not destroy it. God's justice could not nullify it. Our sin, death, corruption, and eternity could not withstand it. Our temptations cannot destroy it. Not even our many falls can cause our God to withdraw his love.

Third, the Word of God assures us of **ONE SURE CONSEQUENCE OF GOD'S LOVE** (Eph. 1:4-5). All who are loved of God now, were loved of God from eternity, and shall be loved of God forever. And the love of God shall bring us home to heaven at last in the perfection of everlasting glory. In the end, when all things are finished, when the sons of God are in the Father's heavenly kingdom and all the wicked are cast into hell, what will be the difference between the saints in heaven and the wicked in hell? Not our goodness! Not our free-will! Not our baptism! Not our faithfulness! Not our creed! Not our church! But *"the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"* Because he loved us God determined to save us, chose us to be his own, predestined us to be his sons, redeemed us by the precious blood of Christ, called us by his Spirit, keeps us by his grace, and shall bring us to glory. **What is our response to the love of God?** *"We love him because he first loved us!"* (1 John 4:19). Let your heart be filled and overwhelmed with this thought. Nothing *"shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* God's love for us is our incentive in all things: Devotion to Him (1 Cor. 6:19-20), Giving (2 Cor. 8:9), Our Confidence of Faith in Him (Rom. 8:32), and Brotherly Kindness (Eph. 4:32-5:1). *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another"* (1 John 4:11).

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #14

“God Is Love”

1 John 4:16

The Bible specifically tells us three things about the nature of God and we must form all our thoughts about God in the light of these three things.

1. **“God is Spirit”** (John 4:24). In the original text there is no corresponding word for the indefinite article “a”. And really our King James translation here, *“God is a Spirit,”* is horrendous. The text should read “God is Spirit.” To say that God is a Spirit is to suggest that he is one among many. Our Lord’s words to the woman at the well were, *“God is Spirit”* - God is Spirit in the highest sense of the word. This distinguishes him from all his creatures. An angel is a spirit. Satan is a spirit. And man was created with a spirit. But God is Spirit. That means that he has no physical, visible substance, or body. If God had a body, as we do, he could not be omnipresent and infinite, he would be limited to one place. But because *“God is Spirit”* all who worship must worship him in Spirit and in truth.

2. **“God is Light”** (1 John 1:5). *“In him is no darkness at all.”* Light is the exact opposite of darkness. In the Scriptures, “darkness” represents sin, evil, and death. Light represents holiness, truth, and life. When John says, *“God is light,”* his meaning is, God is the sum and essence of all that is good, righteous, and excellent. God is holiness, is truth, and is life, because *“God is light.”*

3. **“God is love”** (1 John 4:8, 16). It is true that God loves. But John is not here describing an act of God. He is describing an

attribute of God. *“God is love.”* As his nature is Spirit and Light, so in the essence of his nature *“God is love.”*

Most of what has been said and written about the love of God reveals how utterly ignorant the world is of God and his love. The love of God is commonly regarded as an amiable, but helpless and frustrated passion in God, a sort of good natured indulgence. God’s love is usually reduced to a sentiment, subject to change, like the human emotion we call love. Such love is below our God. And such love produces no ground of comfort for our souls. Whenever we think about the love of God we must understand that God’s love is altogether like himself, for *“God is love.”*

THE LOVE OF GOD IS UNINFLUENCED (Deut. 7:7-8).

When I say that the love of God is uninfluenced, I mean that there was nothing in us, and nothing foreseen in us, that caused God to love us or attracted his love to us. This kind of love is totally foreign to mankind. Any love we have for others is caused by something in them. God’s love is totally free, spontaneous, uncaused (I John 4:10, 19).

Our minds must be clear about this if we would honor God in our hearts. The love of God for us is uncaused by us. There was nothing in us to attract God’s love. There was everything in us to repel God’s love. And God knew that his love for us, though fully manifested and revealed to us, would produce very slight love in return, and even that love would have to be produced in us by his gracious operations upon our hearts and souls. Yet, he loved us from himself, *“according to his own purpose.”*

THE LOVE OF GOD IS ETERNAL (Jer. 31:3).

This is indisputable. God himself is eternal. And God is love. Therefore, the love of God must be eternal. As God has no beginning, so his love has no beginning. Eternal love transcends the thoughts of our finite minds. We cannot comprehend it. But we can rejoice in it. We can adore it. How blessed it is to know that the great and glorious

God loved us before the worlds were made! He set his heart upon us from eternity. Long before we had any being, almighty God loved us, chose us, and predestinated us unto the adoption of sons (Eph. 1:4-5). God's eternal love for us should evoke constant praise from our hearts (Eph. 1:3). And his eternal love for us should fill our hearts with comfort and quieten our souls.

“Since God's love toward me had no beginning, it can have no ending! Since it is true that ‘from everlasting to everlasting’ He is God, and since God is love, then it is equally true that ‘from everlasting to everlasting’ He loves his people” (A. W. Pink).

THE LOVE OF GOD IS SOVEREIGN (Rom. 9:13). This too is a self-evident necessity, altogether beyond dispute. God is sovereign in all things. He is under obligation to no one. He is a law unto himself. He always acts according to his own, imperial, sovereign pleasure. Because God is God he always does as he pleases. Because God is love, he loves whom he will (Rom. 9:13-18).

This is a blessed fact that needs to be clearly understood. God is totally uninfluenced by anything in his creatures. He is infinitely above, independent of, and sovereign over his creatures. God's love is not for sale. His love cannot be bought. His grace cannot be won. His salvation cannot be earned. He says, “*I will love them freely!*” (Hos. 14:4). And his free and sovereign love is the basis of all his works of grace (Rom. 8:28-31).

THE LOVE OF GOD IS INFINITE (Eph. 3:17-19). Everything about God is infinite, beyond measure calculation, or comprehension. His essence fills the universe. His knowledge comprehends everything, past, present, and future. His power is uncontrollable. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. And his love is without limit, indescribably infinite (Eph. 2:4; John 3:16).

There is a depth to God's love which no line can fathom. There is a height to God's love that no mind can scale. There is length to God's love that no heart can comprehend. There is a breadth to God's love that no imagination can reach.

The love of God reaches down to the lowest dregs of fallen, humanity and lifts guilty sinners up to the very height of God's glorious throne. The love of God stretches across the length and breadth of this sin cursed earth and gathers his elect from afar. The hymn writer captured the meaning of Paul's words.

“Could we with ink the oceans fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade -
To write the love of God above
Would drain the oceans dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky!”

THE LOVE OF GOD IS IMMUTABLE.

“His love no end nor measure knows,
No change can turn its course;
Eternally the same it flows,
From one eternal source!”

Like God himself, with his love there is “*no variableness, neither shadow of turning*” (James 1:18). His love does not change. It never increases. It ever decreases. It never ends.

Poor, shifting Jacob is an illustration of God's immutable love (Mal. 3:6). Jacob's great uncle, Lot, is another example of the immutability of God's love (Gen. 19:16). Our Lord's disciples were all examples of God's immutable love (John 13:1). Philip said, “*Show us the Father.*” Peter denied him with an oath. All forsook

him. Thomas doubted his word of promise and his resurrection. Nevertheless, *“having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end!”* The love of God is immutable, indestructible love. Above all, the man writing these lines is an example of the immutability of God’s love. I have proved that his love is as stronger than death (Son of Sol. 8:6-7). Let every believer, knowing the love of God in Christ, give praise to him that nothing can separate us from it (Rom. 8:34-39).

THE LOVE OF GOD IS SAVING. The love of God cannot be separated from the grace of God. And the grace of God cannot be separated from the salvation of God’s elect. That love of God from which we cannot be separated is clearly set forth in Romans 8:28-39. The love of God is the commitment of his holy Being to the salvation of those sinners who are loved by him. And that commitment is seen in these four things.

1. His sovereign providence (v. 28).
2. His saving purpose (vv. 29-30).
3. His substitutionary provision (vv. 32-34).
4. His steadfast preservation (vv. 35-39).

“If God be for us, who can be against us?” God is for the people whom he loves! And every sinner loved of God has been predestinated to eternal salvation, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and shall be born again by the irresistible grace of the Holy Spirit, be preserved blameless to the end, and be saved at last (Jude 24-25)!

THE LOVE OF GOD IS FRUITFUL (1 John 4:7-20). The love of God produces the fruit of grace in all who know it and believe it. What does it produce? It produces faith in Christ (vv. 9-16), brotherly love (vv. 8-20), confidence in the promise of God (vv. 17-18), and love for God himself (v. 19).

“We have known and believed the love that God hath to us” (v. 16). We know it and believe it by the revelation of his love in the

sacrifice of Christ (vv. 9-10) and by the revelation of Christ in our hearts by the Spirit (vv. 13-14).

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #15

The Longsuffering of God

2 Peter 3:9

There was a day when the depravity of the human race had plunged to such depths of corruption that *“every imagination of the thoughts of (man’s) heart was only evil continually.”* So great was the wickedness of man that when God saw it, *“It repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth”* (Gen. 6:5-7). And at the appointed time the wrath of God swept across the earth in a great, universal flood, destroying every soul, except Noah and his family who were saved in the ark God had provided.

Once there was a pair of twin cities, rich, populace, and influential, perhaps the most wealthy and influential cities in the world. But the wickedness of those cities was great. Not only had the vile, disgusting practice of homosexuality become an acceptable lifestyle, it had become the predominate and preferred lifestyle! In those twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, homosexuals were no longer queer people They were normal! Sexual perverts were in the majority. It appears that there was only one man in that vast metropolis who neither practiced nor condoned the wicked practice of homosexuality. Righteous Lot vexed his soul from day to day with the deeds of those godless people. And Lot’s God was vexed too. One morning, as the inhabitants of the city awoke and began the day, God rained fire and brimstone out of heaven, scorching every man, woman, and child to death in his hot anger, except Lot and two of his daughters who were delivered by the hand of his grace.

If God destroyed the world with a flood because of the wickedness of Noah's generation, and if God rained fire from heaven upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their crimes against nature, why has he not yet sent his Son in judgment to destroy this world? In Noah's generation, men and women were no different than they are now. And the moral debauchery of Sodom was nothing compared to the perversion of our society. At least in that day homosexuality was confined to two totally godless cities. Today the perversion is worldwide, openly promoted by men and women who claim to worship and serve God! Why then is the world still standing? Has God changed? Has he altered his law? Has the Holy One become tolerant of man's sin? Will God no longer punish the wicked? Let none be so foolish as to imagine such things. God never changes. His law still stands. He must and shall punish sin.

Why does God tolerate this world and the wickedness of men and women who openly defy his holiness and blaspheme his name? The answer to that question is found in 2 Peter 3:9. *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* It is the longsuffering of God toward his elect that prevents him from destroying the world in his wrath at this hour.

Perhaps some who read these lines are yet without Christ. If so, I want you to understand that the only thing that keeps you out of hell at this moment is the longsuffering of almighty God. If I had nothing else to say, that ought to cause you to fall down before him and sue for mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. God waits to be gracious to sinners for Christ's sake. Today is the day of salvation. But there is a day coming when he will reserve mercy no longer. The day is coming when he will no longer restrain his wrath. He has said, *"My Spirit shall not always strive with man"* (Gen. 6:3). The days of God's patience with man are numbered. Then you will know the terror of his fierce anger and inflexible justice. What will become

of your soul in that day no tongue can describe. God help you now to trust his Son.

In this study I want to raise and answer four questions which, I trust, will help us to understand something about the longsuffering of God.

I. HOW DOES THE BIBLE DESCRIBE GOD'S LONGSUFFERING? Whenever we think of God's longsuffering, we must not suppose that it is a mere passion or weakness of nature with him. Longsuffering is an attribute of God's nature. It arises from the goodness of his Being. It is the patience and forbearance of God.

When God revealed his glory to Moses, he said, "*The LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, the LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth*" (Ex. 34:6). That great prophet used God's longsuffering as an argument with him in prayer, making it the grounds of his intercession for Israel. "*The LORD is longsuffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression...Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of thy mercy*" (Num. 14:18-19). David wrote, "*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities*" (Psa. 103:8-10). God, speaking by the mouth of Isaiah, said, "*For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off*" (Isa. 48:9). The Apostle Paul reasoned with the unbeliever, who vainly imagines that he shall escape the judgment of God, saying, "*despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*" (Rom. 2:4). In Romans 3:25 he tells us that God has set forth the Lord Jesus Christ "*to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the*

forbearance of God.” And Peter tells us that we are to “*account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation*”(II Pet. 3:15). These seven passages that we have read in the book of God teach us five things about God’s longsuffering.

1. It is the glory of God to be longsuffering toward sinful men.
2. God’s longsuffering arises from the goodness of his Being. God is longsuffering because he is good. Longsuffering is the exercise of his mercy and kindness. It is a part of his purpose and grace in salvation. God’s longsuffering encourages faith and hope in him. And the design, purpose, and intent of God’s longsuffering is to bring chosen sinners to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).
3. The longsuffering of God is the moderation and restraint of his anger.
4. The longsuffering of God is an extension of his mercy to men and women who deserve his wrath.⁴
5. The longsuffering of God is the deferred execution of his justice for a season.

The Scriptures abound with illustrations of God’s longsuffering. For 120 years God warned the old world of his sure judgment and called them to repentance by the mouth of his servant Noah (Gen. 6:3). For many years God allowed the Sodomites to persist in their sins. He warned them of his sure judgment. But they would not heed his warnings (Gen. 18). The Lord showed great longsuffering with Pharaoh. But Pharaoh hardened his heart and defied God (Ex. 5). God was longsuffering

⁴ Grace is extended and given to God’s elect alone. Mercy is extended to all while they live in this world. Grace is salvation. Mercy is the postponement of wrath.

with Israel for 2000 years. And the Lord God has been very longsuffering with those living in this world who yet refuse to trust his dear Son. Like the barren fig tree, they cumber the ground (Lk. 13:6-9).

II. WHY IS GOD LONGSUFFERING WITH SINNERS? If God does not immediately execute his wrath and justice upon those who break his law and despise his gospel, there must be some reason for it. He must have some purpose and motive for deferring his anger. What is it? Why is God longsuffering with wicked men?

God is longsuffering with wicked men and women for Christ's sake. Every blessing of grace comes to sinners through the hands of Christ, the Mediator between God and men. Were it not for the mediation of Christ, every sinner would perish immediately. God bore with the sins of his people in the Old Testament, with great patience and forbearance, not imputing their trespasses unto them, in anticipation of Christ's sacrifice (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15). God is longsuffering with sinners today for the same reason. There stands between us and God the God-man Mediator; and our names are written upon his heart. Between God's elect and the law of God stands the cross of Christ. For Christ's sake God was and is longsuffering to us. He has put up with our sins, borne our insults, and been patient with our unbelief because Christ died for us; and he must have us!

But I want you to see this too - **God is longsuffering with sinners for their sake.** It is the good pleasure of God to show mercy to sinners upon the earth. God allows the wicked to live that he may give them space for repentance. If you are yet living in enmity against God, do not despise his goodness and forbearance. You deserve to be in hell right now! But God has put off the execution of his wrath for a season. He has done so because he is willing to be gracious - God is willing to save sinners (Isa. 30:18; Ezek. 18:23, 33; 33:11).

Let us be precise in our theology. But do not let your understanding of God's sovereignty, predestination, election, effectual redemption, and irresistible grace become twisted and perverted, causing you to imagine that God is hard. He is not. Our God delights in mercy (Mic. 7:17). He commands the guilty to repent and believe on his Son. He promises salvation to all who believe. He has given you the means of grace. It is through the preaching of the gospel (written as well as oral) that God saves chosen, redeemed sinners (Rom. 10:13-17). He has given you opportunity to repent. He has warned you of wrath to come. God is longsuffering to sinners, not because he is unable or unwilling to punish, but because *"he delighteth in mercy!"* Judgment is his strange work.

God is longsuffering with men for the sake of his own glory. By his longsuffering and willingness to save, the Lord God vindicates himself from all charges of unrighteousness, cruelty, and injustice. If you die in your sins, your guilt is inexcusable. Your damnation is just and righteous. God has given you light. But you despise the light. God has shown you Christ by the gospel. But you despise his Son. You are without excuse (Rom. 2:1, 4, 5; 3:9-19). In the day of judgment, no one will charge God with injustice. He will stop your mouth!

And God is longsuffering with sinners for the elect's sake (II Pet. 3:9). You will notice that Peter makes a clear and deliberate distinction between "us" who believe and the scoffers who believe not. God is longsuffering with them. But his longsuffering is *"to us-ward,"* his own elect. He is not willing that any of his elect should perish, but that they all repent and obtain salvation by Christ. Therefore, he is longsuffering with all men. Just as God would not destroy Sodom until Lot was delivered from it, so he will not destroy this world until the last of his elect has been regenerated and effectually called to Christ in faith by the irresistible grace and power of his Holy Spirit. God is not willing for one soul to perish whom he has chosen to save (John 10:16). He is

not willing for any to perish for whom Christ died (Isa. 53:10-11). The Lord God is not willing that any perish to whom he has promised eternal life (2 Tim. 1:9). To us the longsuffering of God is salvation (II Pet. 3:15). Because God is not willing for us to perish, we shall not perish!

III. WHAT HAS GOD PROMISED TO PERFORM? Peter says, *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise.”* That is to say, What God has promised he will do. And the promise here spoken of is the glorious second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ will come again, the second time, without sin, unto salvation. This is the blessed hope of God’s saints (Tit. 2:13). We sometimes grow weary of waiting; but we should not. Let us wait patiently for our Redeemer (Hab. 2:3; Heb. 10:37). Christ will come again at the hour appointed from eternity to gather his elect from the earth. He will come in power and great glory to judge the world in his wrath (Rev. 1:7).

This is also promised - Christ will not come to destroy this world until all of God’s elect have been brought to repentance by his almighty grace. We sometimes get into a hurry. God never does. He will not send his Son to judge the world until the time appointed (v. 8). When will Christ come again? **I can tell you exactly when he will come.** Christ will come again when the last sheep has been brought into his fold, when the last stone is place in his holy temple, when the last member has been united to his body, when the number of those who believe tallies exactly with the names registered in the Lamb’s Book of Life, and the last jewel has been placed in the King’s crown. Until then we will patiently wait, for God is not willing that any perish, and neither are we! God would not send the flood until Noah was safely in the ark. He would not destroy Sodom until Lot was safely out of the city. He would not allow the Red Sea to close until every Israelite was safe on the distant shore. And God will not destroy this world until everyone of his elect have been saved by his grace.

IV. WHAT SHALL BECOME OF THOSE WHO DESPISE THE GOODNESS AND FORBEARANCE OF GOD? (Prov. 1:23-33). It is written, *“He that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy”* (Prov. 29:1). If you are in such a state of rebellion and unbelief, unless you flee to Christ for refuge, I warn you now that the day will come when you will seek mercy, but none shall be found (Lk. 13:24-25). In the day of judgment everything and everyone will proclaim the justice of God in your eternal damnation. The law of God will condemn you. The gospel of God will condemn you. The Son of God will condemn you. The servants of God will condemn you. The people of God will condemn you. Believing parents will condemn their unbelieving children. Believing children will condemn their unbelieving parents. The angels of God will condemn you. In that day there will be no mercy, not even a shred of sympathy for your soul anywhere! Even your own conscience will say “Amen” to your condemnation! In that great day everyone shall *“sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints”* (Rev. 15:3). If there is one place in hell hotter than another, the hottest place in hell shall be reserved for those who have heard but refused to believe the gospel of the grace of God. Today is the day of salvation. Come to Christ now, before you lay this study down, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; and join God’s saints in giving thanks to him for his longsuffering, by which we are saved!

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #16

The Lovingkindness of God

Psalm 36:7-10

Lovingkindness, like holiness, immutability, infinity, and justice is an attribute of God, a characteristic of his Being that is essential to his Being. Without lovingkindness, God would not be God. If you look up this word “lovingkindness” in a concordance, you will see that it is a word that is used exclusively with reference to God. In our English Bible it is never applied to any of his creatures. That fact arouses my curiosity. What is the meaning of this word “lovingkindness”? It is the kindness of God arising from and directed by his love for his elect. This word, “lovingkindness”, is used thirty times in the Bible. All thirty times, it is found in the Old Testament. And twenty-three of those thirty references are found in the Psalms of David. That fact suggests that God’s lovingkindness inspires faith, hope, prayer, and worship in the hearts of his people.

Arthur Pink said God’s lovingkindness is “His paternal favor to his people, his tender affection toward them.”

The puritan, Thomas Manton, described God’s lovingkindness as, “His disposition to do good upon his own motives, or his self-inclination to do good to his creatures, especially to his people, his native willingness to employ what goodness is in him for the good of his creatures.

It is the lovingkindness of God that encourages poor sinners to draw near to God, put their trust in him, and seek from him the mercy they need. *"How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings."* The justice of God gives men what they deserve. The

lovingkindness of God gives men what they need. We should make the prayer of David our own prayer continually - *“Show thy marvellous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee”* (Psa. 17:7). God’s lovingkindness is marvellous indeed. I am amazed that God, who is so infinitely above us, so inconceivably glorious, so ineffably holy, should not only allow such sinful worms as we are to live in his universe, but also show us such marvellous lovingkindness as to set his heart upon us, give his Son to redeem us send his Spirit to dwell within us, and patiently bear with all our infirmities and sins, promising never to remove his lovingkindness from us.

GOD’S LOVINGKINDNESS IS REVEALED TO US IN ALL HIS WORKS OF GRACE. The lovingkindness of God is the source and cause of our salvation. The covenant of God’s grace runs like this - *“I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the LORD”* (Hos. 2:19-20). Predestination and election are works of God’s lovingkindness (Eph. 1:4-5). Our redemption by Christ is a manifestation of God’s lovingkindness (I John 4:9). The gracious operations of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and conversion are the results of God’s eternal lovingkindness toward his elect (Jer. 31:3). Because of his lovingkindness toward us, almighty God has entered into an everlasting marriage contract with us and caused us to enter into an indissoluble marriage contract with him (Hos. 2:16; Isa. 62:1-5).

The Lovingkindness of our God is immutable. It never varies. It never changes. It is never removed from his children. Sometimes it appears to us that God has removed his lovingkindness, and our circumstances cause us to cry out with David, *“LORD, where are thy former lovingkindness?”* (Psa. 89:49). But our heavenly Father never ceases to exercise his lovingkindness toward his own elect. Neither the temptations of satan nor our many sins can make void the lovingkindness of our

great God. God's lovingkindness is in Christ (Psa. 40:11). Because we are in Christ nothing can ever separate us from his great lovingkindness (Rom. 8:39). God's lovingkindness is linked to his truth, proceeding upon the promise of his Word which cannot be broken (Psa. 138:2). God's lovingkindness is made sure to all his elect by his own holy decree in the covenant of grace (Psa. 89:31-34). And God has sworn that neither his covenant nor the kindness of his love shall ever depart from his own (Isa. 54:10).

Because he promised it in the covenant from eternity, and because that covenant has been ratified by the blood of Christ, we have no cause for despair. *"The LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me"* (Psa. 42:8).

GOD'S LOVINGKINDNESS REVEALED IN CHRIST INVITES AND ENCOURAGES SINNERS TO TRUST IN HIM.

Read David's words of praise again: *"How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings."* It is true that God is holy, righteous, just, and true. But *"he delighteth in mercy."* His lovingkindness is one of the *"sure mercies of David"* which God has promised to all who come to him by faith in Christ (Isa. 55:3-7). It is the lovingkindness of God revealed in the gospel of our crucified Substitute that draws sinners to the Savior (John 12:32).

GOD'S LOVINGKINDNESS IS A SOURCE OF CONSTANT HELP TO HIS BELIEVING PEOPLE.

David said, *"Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth"* (Psa. 26:3). His meditation upon God's lovingkindness taught David how to walk in accordance with God's revealed truth. And God's lovingkindness teaches us how to walk in his truth.

The believer's rule of life is not the law of God, with its threats of judgment and wrath, but the love of God revealed in Christ and experienced in our souls. The law was never given to be a ruler of life for the godly, but as a terrifying restraint for the

ungodly (1 Tim. 1:5-10). Believer's are motivated, governed, and ruled by the love of God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:14; 1 John 3:23). Our rule of life is the whole revealed will of God in the Scriptures as exemplified by our Lord Jesus Christ (John 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:21).

God's lovingkindness is the pattern by which we are to mold our conduct to one another. The Apostle's admonition is - *"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour"* (Eph. 4:32-5:1). Again the Holy Spirit directs us to *"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering"* (Colossians 3:12).

God's lovingkindness promotes and strengthens faith and confidence in him. *"How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart"* (Psa. 36:7-10).

God's lovingkindness inspires worship and praise. The sweet singer of Israel sang, *"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee"* (Psa. 63:1-3).

God's tried, troubled and afflicted children in this world look to his great lovingkindness for comfort. In times of trouble

and trial we cry, *"Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant"* (Psa. 119:76).

God's lovingkindness is an argument to use with him in prayer to urge our plea for his mercy. Isaiah did. *"I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses"* (Isa. 63:7). David prayed the same way. *"Quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness"* (Psa. 119:159).

God's lovingkindness is our hope when we have fallen into sin. When David was smitten in his heart with the guilt of his sin, he cast himself upon the lovingkindness of the Lord and found forgiveness. *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions"* (Psa. 51:1).

God's lovingkindness is our daily guide. Let us pray daily for grace to know and live according to God's lovingkindness revealed in Christ. *"Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness"* (Psa. 143:8-10). Those who seek to mold and govern their lives by God's lovingkindness will be well-governed. Their lives have been cast by the right mold.

"How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. O continue thy

lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart."

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #17

The Goodness Of God

Nahum 1:7

We do not know who Nahum was, what kind of man he was, who his parents were, how long he lived, where he died, who his descendants were, or even if he had any descendants. All we know about this man, Nahum, is that he was a prophet of God who carried in his heart the burden of the Word of the Lord and faithfully proclaimed the message God gave him to his generation. Nahum was one of those men who faithfully served the Lord in obscurity, without fame or recognition in this world. But he was a faithful man who served a faithful God. For him that was enough. God tells us virtually nothing about Nahum; but Nahum tells us much about God. Read Nahum 1:2-7 carefully.

We are studying the attributes of God. As we have seen already, God's attributes are those characteristics of his Being which are essential to him, without which he would not be God. Nahum began his prophecy with a declaration of God's attributes. He does not declare all the attributes of God's Being. No man could do that. But he does give us six distinct attributes of Deity, six things which are essential to and descriptive of God's holy character. Who is God? What is he like? **Nahum tells us that...**

1. "**God is jealous.**" With God jealousy is not a fault, but an attribute. It is right for God to be jealous because he is perfect. Any assault upon his person, resistance to his will, rebellion against his rule, or objection to his work is evil. It is right for God to be jealous. God is jealous for his Son - Ask those who crucified him! God is jealous for his own honor and glory - Ask Moses! God is jealous for his worship and ordinances - Ask Uzza! God is jealous for his people - Ask Pharaoh! God will avenge his own elect. He will avenge the honor of his name. He will avenge himself upon his enemies. Read verse two again. "God is jealous, and the LORD

revenge; the LORD revenge, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth *wrath*¹ for his enemies."

Today men talk about God's love as though his love is a fluctuating passion, like ours, and altogether isolated from his other glorious attributes. The fact that "*God is love*" does not in anyway diminish the fact that "*God is jealous*." In fact, it is God's love that makes him jealous, so jealous that he is "furious" and "*reserveth wrath for his enemies*."¹

2. "*The Lord is slow to anger.*" In other words, this great and terrible God, whose jealousy makes him furious, is also patient, forgiving and longsuffering with sinners. God is not in a hurry to punish sinners and execute judgment upon his enemies. Judgment is his strange work. And he always defers it, giving sinners space for repentance. This is mercy. God is willing to be gracious. God now affords his enemies opportunity to repent and commands them to do so (Acts 17:30; II Pet. 3:9).

3. "*The Lord is great in power.*" He is the omnipotent, almighty God. He has all power, and can do all that he is pleased to do. Our God is a great God, because he is "*great in power*." A weak, frustrated, defeated God is as useless as a bucket without a bottom, or a well without water. What is omnipotence? It is the ability and power of God to do all his pleasure (Isa. 46:9-13), to perform all his Word (Isa. 55:11), to accomplish all his purpose (Rom. 8:28-30), and to save all his people (Rom. 9:13-18). A weak god is a frustration to those who worship him, because a weak god is always frustrated. The almighty, omnipotent Jehovah is the comfort and stay of those who trust him.

4. "*The Lord will not at all acquit the wicked.*" That is to say, God is just. Justice and truth are the habitation of his throne. Though he is longsuffering and patient, he will punish every transgressor. God's forbearance is not an indication that he lacks either the will or the ability to punish his enemies. He is great in power. And he is just. Therefore, "*the soul that sinneth, it shall die.*" God will not clear the guilty. A just God cannot clear the guilty.

If God is just and must punish sin, how can any sinner ever be saved? Will God lay aside his justice that he might be merciful? No. He cannot. Justice is essential to his character. How then can he save us? There is only one way - Substitution (Job 33:24; Prov. 16:6; Rom. 3:24-26). If God almighty saves a guilty sinner and forgives his sins, three things must be done. *First*, the sinner must be punished to the full satisfaction of justice. *Second*, his sins and guilt must be totally removed. *Third*, he must become perfectly righteous. And these three things can be done only by the substitutionary work of Christ. God punished our sins to the full satisfaction of his justice when Christ died as our Substitute (Gal. 3:13). He removed them from us altogether and put them away by the sacrifice of his dear Son (Heb. 9:26). And he has imputed to us Christ's perfect righteousness in exactly the same way and to the same degree as he imputed our sins to Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).

5. "The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm."

What do those words mean? They mean that the Lord our God, who is jealous, longsuffering, omnipotent, and just, is also totally sovereign. He rules all things. "*And the clouds are the dust of his feet!*" (Read Psa. 115:3; 135:6). In all things, at all times, with all creatures, and in all places, "The Lord hath his way!" In creation, in providence, and in grace, "*The Lord hath his way!*" We rejoice in the glorious sovereignty of our great God, knowing that God always exercises his sovereignty over all things for the redemption and salvation of his people (vv. 4-6; Isa. 45:7, 22; 50:2; 51:10-12). Even as the prophet describes the judgment of God, the fierce anger of his wrath, he raises a question which, when answered, carries a message of hope for sinners - "*Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide the fierceness of his anger?*" Not me! Not you! God's wrath would consume us like a snowflake in a blast furnace! But the Lord Jesus Christ, our great Substitute, stood before the indignation of almighty God and consumed his wrath for us! Do you see these attributes of God? The Lord is jealous. The Lord is longsuffering. The Lord is omnipotent. The Lord is just. The Lord is sovereign. Now read verse 7. "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

6. "The Lord is good!" Our great God is good! Goodness is as essential to God's Being as sovereignty, justice, truth, and holiness. In fact, the very name "God" is an abbreviation of the word "good." Goodness is the character of our God; and the goodness of God gives us hope, comfort, and strength in the midst of our trials and sorrows in this world. Look at what the Holy Spirit here tells us by his servant Nahum about the goodness of our God.

"THE LORD IS GOOD!" Nahum has been talking about the storm of God's wrath, the terror of his justice, the greatness of his anger, whirlwinds, shaking mountains, melting hills, and burning earth. Then, he comes to a blessed, calm, serene island of rest – "*The Lord is good.*" I can no more explain the goodness of God than a thimble could contain the ocean. But I can tell you some of the things I know about God's goodness. **God is essentially good.** Goodness is essential to God. Without it, he would not be God. Goodness is so essentially the character of God that, as John Gill has observed, "There is nothing but goodness in God, and nothing but goodness comes from him" (James 1:13-14). He permits evil, but overrules it for good (Psa. 76:10). He afflicts his children and brings many evil things upon us, but he makes the evil work for good (Rom. 8:28; Prov. 12:21; Gen. 50:20). God punishes sin with vengeance, but even that punishment of sin is good, as a vindication of justice and the protection of his kingdom. **God is singularly good.** He is the only good One in the universe (Matt. 19:17). "God's goodness is the root of all goodness. Our goodness, if we have any, springs out of his goodness" (William Tyndale). **God is eternally and immutably good** (Mal. 3:6). The goodness of God never varies, changes, or alters. He is good, always good, good in each of his glorious Persons. God the Father is good. God the Son is good. God the Holy Spirit is good. **God is good in all his acts of grace** (Eph. 1:3-14). **God is good in all his works of providence** (Rom. 8:28). In all that he has done, is doing, and shall hereafter do God is good. **God is infinitely, incomparably, immeasurably good.** Who can measure the goodness of God? To what shall his goodness be compared? He is good beyond our highest estimation of what good is. **God is good to his own elect**

(Psa. 23:6). "*The Lord is good!*" That is a sentence worthy of constant meditation. Eternity itself will not tell out the fullness of God's goodness. And all his goodness is directed toward us at all times!

"THE LORD IS A STRONGHOLD IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE."

The only place of safety in this world is the place we find beneath the shadow of his wings (Prov. 18:10). The Lord who is good is our stronghold, our place of refuge. He is our refuge in the day of trouble (Heb. 6:18; 4:16). We have our days of trouble as long as we live in this world, but notice how Nahum describes them. Everyday of trouble is "the" day of God's appointment. Every day of trouble is temporary – only the "day" of trouble (II Cor. 4:17-18). Whatever the trouble may be, the Lord is our stronghold in the midst of the "trouble," every kind of trouble (Heb. 4:16). A stronghold is a mighty fortress for the protection of citizens against the aggressions of enemies. It is a place of safety, of peace, of residence, and of provision.

"THE LORD KNOWETH THEM THAT TRUST IN HIM." Do you trust in him? Do you trust his Son, his finished work, his abundant grace, his many promises, his providential rule, his unerring wisdom? Do you trust this great, mighty, good God? If you do, hear this and be of good comfort - "*The Lord knoweth them that trust in him.*" That word "knoweth" is overflowing with consolation. It means that the Lord has foreordained and predestinated them that trust in him (Rom. 8:29). He everlastingly loves them that trust in him (Jer. 31:3). He loves us without cause, without condition, without beginning, without change, and without end. The Lord is intimately acquainted with them that trust in him (Matt. 10:30). He knows who they are, where they are, and what they need. The Lord graciously approves of and accepts them that trust in him (Eph. 1:6). The Lord holds loving communion with them that trust in him (John 15:15). The Lord tenderly cares for them that trust in him (Isa. 43:1-5). He is with you. He will protect you. He will provide for you. He will help you. He will keep you.

Tamar may disguise herself so that Judah does not know her. Isaac, through dimness of sight, may pass over Esau and bless Jacob. Joseph may forget, or be forgotten by, his brethren. Solomon may not be able to tell who the child belongs to. And Christ may come to his own and not be received. But "*the Lord knoweth them that trust in him.*" He knows Daniel in the lion's den. He knows Job on the dunghill. He knows Peter in prison. He knows Lazarus at the rich man's gate. He knows Abel falling to the ground by his brother's wrath. He knows me. And he know you (2 Tim. 2:19).

And the Lord will publicly own them that trust him (Rev. 3:5). He owns us now. He owns us before the throne (1 John 2:1-2). He will own us before all worlds in the last day. Let us ever trust the goodness of God, even when we cannot see his goodness. Let us flee to and abide in our mighty Stronghold. Let us ever trust our Savior's loving care. If the Lord who is good knows us, we want nothing else to satisfy us. He knows us eternally. He knows us perfectly. He knows us universally (Psa. 107:8, 15, 21, 31). If he who is good knows us, all is well!

¹The word "wrath" is not in the original text. It was added by our translators. What God reserves for his enemies is inconceivably and inexpressibly horrifying! "God is jealous" (Nah. 1:2).

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD Lesson #18

The Grace Of God *Romans 5:20-21*

The source and fountain of grace is God the Father (Eph. 1:3) who purposed in himself the everlasting salvation of an elect multitude before the world began, and on behalf of that elect multitude made a covenant of grace with his Son, ordered in all things and sure.

The mediatorial channel of grace is God the Son (John 1:17). The grace of God is revealed and given to men only by the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ. *“The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”* Certainly, that does not mean that God did not save men by grace before the incarnation of Christ. He did. Salvation has always been by grace (Gen. 6:8). And that grace has always been found and given in Christ (Rom. 3:24-26). But grace and truth were fully revealed in the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. Christ alone always has been, is now, and shall forever be the solitary channel of grace (Rom. 5:15, 17, 21; 1 Tim. 2:5). Grace does not come through the church. Grace cannot be conferred by some pretentious, earthly priest, and grace is not given through the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Grace comes to sinners through Christ alone.

The only bestower of grace is God the Holy Spirit who is called *“the Spirit of grace”* by the prophet Zechariah (12:10). He is the One who applies the gospel to the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners with saving power. He quickens God’s elect while they are yet spiritually dead. He conquers the rebel’s will, melts the hard heart, opens the blind eye, and cleanses the soul. He gives ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel of God is the message of grace. It is called "*the gospel of the grace of God*" (Acts 20:24). To the self-righteous religionist, it is a stumbling block. To the learned, philosophical worldling, it is foolishness. Why? Because there is nothing in the gospel to gratify the pride of man. The gospel of God declares that man can never be saved, but by the grace of God. It declares that apart from Christ, the unspeakable gift of God's grace, there is no salvation and the state of every human being is desperate, hopeless, and irretrievable. The gospel addresses men and women as depraved, guilty, condemned, perishing sinners. It puts us all upon one level. The gospel declares that the purest moralist is in the same condition as the vilest profligate, that the zealous religionist is no better off than the most profane infidel. Without Christ, without grace, all are lost.

The gospel addresses every descendant of Adam as a fallen, polluted, hell-bent, hell-deserving sinner, utterly incapable of changing his ruined condition. The grace of God is our only hope. All men, by nature, stand before God's holy law as justly condemned felons, awaiting the execution of his wrath (John 3:18, 36; Rom. 3:19). I repeat myself deliberately, our only hope is grace! "Grace is a provision for men who are so fallen that they cannot lift the ax of justice, so corrupt that they cannot change their own nature, so averse to God that they cannot turn to him, so blind that they cannot see him, so deaf that they cannot hear him, and so dead that he must himself open their graves and lift them into resurrection" - (*George S. Bishop*). Our only hope of salvation and eternal life is the grace of God freely bestowed upon sinners through Jesus Christ, the sinner's Substitute. As we study this marvelous attribute of our God, I want to show you the character of grace, the works of grace, and some of the illustrations of grace as displayed and described in the Word of God.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD'S GRACE - Grace as it is displayed in the Word of God and grace as it is understood by most

people are altogether different things. All the religious world talks about salvation by grace. But few understand the character of God's grace as it is revealed in holy Scripture. As soon as grace is defined in biblical terms, man's opposition to it comes to surface. Grace is an attribute of God which, like his love, is exercised only toward his elect. Nowhere in the Bible do we read of universal grace, or of grace bestowed upon mankind in general. The mercy of God is "over all his works" (Psa. 145:9). But the grace of God is upon his elect. The mercy of God is life upon this earth. The grace of God is eternal life. Mercy is anything short of eternal wrath. The grace of God is eternal salvation. Grace is the solitary source from which the goodwill, love, and salvation of God flow to his chosen people. "It is the eternal and absolute free favor of God, manifested in the vouchsafement (infallible promise) of spiritual and eternal blessings to the guilty and unworthy" (*Abraham Booth*).

Arthur Pink wrote, "Divine grace is the sovereign and saving favor of God exercised in bestowing blessings upon those who have no merit in them and for which no compensation is demanded." Grace is completely unmerited and unsought. It is altogether unattracted by us. Grace cannot be bought, earned, or won by anything in us or done by us. If it could, it would cease to be grace. Grace is bestowed upon sinners without attraction, without condition, without qualification. When it first comes, it comes as a matter of pure charity, unsought, unasked, and undesired.

In Bible terms, grace is placed in direct opposition to works, worthiness, and merit in the creature (Rom. 11:6; 4:4-5; Eph. 2:8-9). Grace and works will not mix. And any attempt by man to mix the grace of God with the works of man or the will of man is both blasphemy and a total denial of grace.

If you will search the Scriptures, you will find that there are four things which always characterize the grace of God. Whenever men speak contrary to these four things they deny the grace of God. (1.) **The grace of God is eternal** (Rom. 8:28-30; 2 Tim. 1:9).

Grace does not originate in time and cannot be controlled or directed by anything in time. Grace is eternal. (2.) **The grace of God is free** (Rom. 3:24). When God declares in his Word that his grace is free, he is telling us that his grace is without qualification, without condition, and without change. (3.) **The grace of God is sovereign** (Rom. 5:21). Grace reigns, everywhere, over all things. If grace reigns, then it reigns from a throne. And the One who sits upon the throne is sovereign. The throne of the sovereign God is called "*the throne of grace*" (Heb. 4:16). When the Bible declares that grace is sovereign, it is declaring that God is gracious to whom he will be gracious (Rom. 9:11-18). Salvation (eternal life) is the gift of God (Rom. 6:23). If it is a gift, it cannot be claimed as a right. If it is a gift, it cannot be earned. If it is a gift, the Giver is free to bestow it upon whom he will. Nothing so riles man's hatred of God as the declaration that grace is free, sovereign, and eternal. This is the offense of the gospel (Gal. 5:11). Grace is abasing to man's proud heart, putting all upon one level, declaring all to be helpless, justly condemned sinners, dead in trespasses and sins. Grace gives no recognition to the righteousness of man, except that all our righteousnesses are filthy rags before God (Isa. 64:6). Grace makes fallen man to be utterly dependent upon the goodness of God for salvation. And (4.) **the grace of God is distinguishing** (1 Cor. 4:7). Grace discriminates men from men. Grace segregates men. Grace makes differences between men. Grace chooses some and passes by others. God has his favorites whom he has from eternity singled out from the rest of Adam's race, to whom he will be gracious (John 15:16; Eph. 1:4-6; 2 Thess. 2:13-14). Grace separated Abraham from the rest of his family. Grace separated Jacob and Esau. Grace separated David from his brothers. The only difference between the children of God and the children of the devil is grace. Every child of God knows it and gladly acknowledges, "*By the grace of God I am what I am*" (1 Cor. 15:10).

THE WORKS OF GRACE - It is absolutely essential that we understand that everything involved in the salvation of sinners is the work of God's grace. There is nothing required for our salvation

that is in anyway dependent upon, determined by, or conditioned upon man, not the worth of man, not the works of man, and not the will of man. We are saved by grace alone (Eph. 1:3-14; 2:1-9). I cannot state this fact too strongly. It cannot be over-emphasized. Salvation is by grace alone, without works. God's election is the election of grace (Rom. 11:5-6). God's covenant is the covenant of grace (Psa. 89:2-3). Our adoption into the family of God was by grace (Eph. 1:5-6). The redemption of our souls by Christ was a marvelous work of God's grace (Heb. 2:9). We are justified freely by God's grace (Eph. 1:7). We are forgiven by grace (Eph. 1:7). Our regeneration and calling is by the grace and power of God the Holy Spirit (Gal. 1:15-16). Our sanctification is by the grace of God (1 Cor. 1:30). Our preservation in grace is by grace. And our resurrection shall be the work of God's grace (John 5:25-28). From the gates of hell to the gate of heavenly glory, we owe our salvation to grace alone. When almighty God has finished the work, he shall *"bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it!"* (Zech. 4:7).

THE TROPHIES OF GOD'S GRACE - The glory of the grace of God shines forth most splendidly when we behold the unworthiness of those whom he has saved by his marvelous grace (1 Cor. 1:26-31). Here are four trophies of grace which will serve to illustrate what I have tried to describe to you.

1. **Manasseh, King of Judah** (2 Chron. 33:1-13) - Manasseh was a barbaric monster. He sacrificed his own children upon fiery altars of idolatry. He filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. His sacrilegious indecencies perverted the whole nation. He lead Judah into corruptions unmentionable even among the heathen. Yet, the grace of God touched his heart, renewed his soul, forgave his sin, and made him an heir of heavenly glory!

2. **Saul of Tarsus** (Acts 9) - A more blood thirsty persecutor of God's church the world has never known than Saul. He was a monster of a man, set upon the destruction of God's lambs, bent

upon the annihilation of Christianity. His thirst for violence and murder was insatiable. His rancorous heart was filled with violence. Never did a man live who, in the opinion of human judgment, was more certainly deserving of eternal damnation. Yet, this godless, implacable wretch of a man is today seated with Christ upon his throne, a trophy of the grace of God!

3. The Corinthians (1 Cor. 6:9-11) - The people at Corinth were the most sensual, profligate people of the ancient Roman world. They were the most vile of the vilest age in the annals of human history. Yet, through the infinitely tender mercies of an ever gracious God, a great multitude of them today are robed in white and crowned with glory.

4. The Man who Writes These Lines - Indulge me a little as I make a personal reference. I cannot refrain from my own testimony to the grace of God. I am Gomer. I am Onesimus. I am the prodigal son. I am a sinner saved by grace. Grace chose me. Grace redeemed me. Grace preserved me. Grace called me. Grace keeps me. Grace will bring me home.

“Naught have I gotten but what I received, Grace hath bestowed it
since I have believed;

Boasting excluded, pride I abase- I’m only a sinner saved by
grace!”

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD Lesson #19

The Mercy of God

Psalm 136:1

In Psalm 136 David declares that God's "*mercy endureth forever*" twenty-six times. In these 26 verses he traces all the works of redemption, grace, and providence to the everlasting mercy of our God. He begins his psalm of praise with these words, "*O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever*" (v. 1). And he ends his song with the same exhortation (v. 26). In this study of the mercy of God I want to inspire your heart to thanksgiving and praise for his mercy. "*O give thanks to the LORD, to the God of gods, to the Lord of lords, to the God of heaven; for he is good, for his mercy endureth forever.*"

The mercy of God is his readiness to relieve the miserable, pardon the guilty, and save the fallen. We often speak of the love, mercy, and grace of God as if they were synonyms, as if love, mercy, and grace were three words describing one attribute. But they are not. The mercy of God is, in some respects, different from both his love and his grace. Unlike love and grace, God's mercy toward us presupposes our misery. God loved us with an everlasting love and chose us as the objects of his grace without any consideration of anything we might do or be, either good or evil (Rom. 9:11). But his mercy toward us anticipated our sin and fall in Adam. Mercy anticipated the miserable condition into which sin has brought us. Mercy presupposed our ruin, our spiritual death, our misery, and our desperate need. So God's mercy to us arises from the goodness of his Being and from the love of his heart toward his elect. Paul declares that "*God, who is rich in mercy, for (because of) his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace are ye*

saved;) and hath raised us up together and made us set together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:4-6). **God's love** for us is the commitment of his Being to our eternal welfare. **God's grace** is the exercise of his love, power, goodness, and holiness for the accomplishment of our salvation. And **God's mercy** is the disposition of his heart and will to pity and relieve those who are in trouble and to pass by their crimes and offenses without wrath and anger.

It is the mercy of God which David describes in Psalm 103, when he says, *"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"* (vv. 13-14). A father may love his son simply because he is his son; but if that son falls into misery, love causes him to be filled with pity and compassion. Then love is turned into mercy. **Mercy is taking another's misery to heart.** And God's mercy is God, because of his great love, taking our misery to heart! No wonder David wrote, *"O give thanks unto the God of heaven; for his mercy endureth forever!"* Here are seven things revealed in the Scriptures about the mercy of God.

THE MERCY OF GOD IS BOTH UNIVERSAL AND SPECIAL. If we would rightly divide the Word of Truth, we must recognize that the Bible distinguishes God's special, saving mercy toward his elect from his common, universal mercy toward all his creatures. **There is a sense in which God is merciful to all his creatures as his creatures** (Psa. 145:9, 15, 16). The love of God is not universal. God's love is reserved for his elect only. And the grace of God is not universal. The Lord is gracious to none but those who are saved by his grace. But the mercy of God is universal. God is merciful to all his creatures. *"The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy"* (Psa. 119:64). There is not a bird in the air, a beast in the forest, a creeping insect in the ground, a creature of the sea, or a man in the world to whom God is not merciful. It is by God's mercy that all creatures are preserved in their beings (Psa. 36:5-6). All creatures cry to God for their food, and he feeds them because he

is merciful (Job 38:41; Psa. 147:9; 104:27-28; Joel 1:18-20). This should be a matter of great comfort to us. If God is so merciful to birds and beasts and to worms and fish, he will never forget to be merciful to his own elect (Matt. 6:25-34; 10:29-31). All men, both righteous and wicked, partake of the providential goodness and mercy of God. He is kind to the unthankful and unholy. He causes his sun to shine upon the good and the evil. He pours out his rain upon the just and the unjust (Lk. 6:35; Matt. 5:45). God, in his mercy, preserves, supports, and provides the necessities of life to all men. He is the Savior of all men, and especially of them that believe (I Tim. 4:10). Life in this world is mercy. Anything short of hell is mercy. In that sense, God's mercy is common to all. It is a general and universal blessing to all that God is merciful. But it must be understood that the reason why God is merciful to the reprobate is his purpose of grace toward his elect (2 Pet. 3:9, 15). God is longsuffering with and merciful toward the reprobate until he has saved all his elect, just as he was merciful to Sodom until Lot had been delivered from the city.

God's special, saving mercy is bestowed only upon his own elect. Others partake of mercy, but God's elect are "*vessels of mercy*" (Rom. 9:23). Child of God, you are a vessel of mercy, a vessel filled with mercy, a vessel filled with nothing but mercy! And by that mercy you are prepared for glory (Eph. 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:2-5; 2:9-10). A. W. Pink wrote of God's special mercy toward his elect in Christ, "There is a sovereign mercy reserved for the heirs of salvation, which is communicated to them in a covenant way through the Mediator." Though mercy is an attribute of God, essential to his Being, his mercy is guided and governed by his sovereign will (Rom. 9:15, 18). There are some to whom God will not be merciful in a saving way (Isa. 27:11). God will not be merciful to any who refuse to confess their sins and trust his Son. God will not be merciful to those who hear his Word, but harden their hearts against it. God will not be merciful to any who are without Christ in the last day. But, blessed be God, there are some to whom he will be merciful! (Read Heb. 8:8-12). God will be merciful to his

covenant people, to those whom he has chosen by his grace, redeemed by the blood of his dear Son, and shall be called by the irresistible power of his Spirit. God will be merciful to all who call upon his name.

2. THE MERCY OF GOD IS FREE. Because mercy is an attribute of God, essential to his Being (Ex. 34:6-7), it is obvious that nothing outside of God can be the cause of his mercy. To say that something other than God himself is the cause of his mercy is to say that something is the cause of God. And that is absurd. God's mercy is free, unmerited, and undeserved. **Our misery is not the cause of God's mercy.** Though God's everlasting mercy presupposed and anticipated our sin and misery, that was not the cause of God's mercy. Mercy is God's readiness to save. Mercy was there before sin ever had any existence. But as soon as sin entered into the world, mercy was revealed. The fact that Adam and Eve were not slain immediately is a display of God's mercy. Mercy sought out the fallen pair. Mercy promised a Savior. Mercy met the needs of their miserable condition by a Substitutionary Sacrifice. **It is certain that the merits of sinful creatures cannot be the cause of God's mercy** (Tit. 3:5). Some suggest that mercy is shown to those who are more deserving and less vile than others. But just the opposite is true. God's mercy is reserved for the vilest and most miserable of his creatures (Rom. 3:9; Eph. 2:3; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Tim. 1:13). **Not even the merits of Christ's obedience and death are the cause of God's mercy.** The incarnation, life, righteousness, and death of Christ as our Substitute are the results of God's mercy, not the cause (Lk. 1:78). Mercy foresaw our need. Mercy provided a Redeemer. Mercy sent Christ into the world. Mercy accomplished our redemption by the satisfaction of justice (Psa. 85:10-11; Prov. 16:6). Mercy arises from the goodness of God's nature and is directed by the unerring wisdom of his sovereign will (Rom. 9:15-18; Ex. 33:19). It is altogether free.

3. THE MERCY OF GOD IS IMMUTABLE. Twenty-six times David repeats it, *"His mercy endureth forever!"* (Mal. 3:6; Lk. 1:50). The mercy of God never departs from his people. Nothing can change it. It is invariably the same. It was laid up in store for us in Christ our Mediator in the covenant of grace from eternity. Therefore, all God's saving mercies are called *"the sure mercies of David"* (Isa. 55:3). And God's mercy toward us is kept with Christ forever (Psa. 89:24, 28, 30-37).

4. THE MERCY OF GOD IS INFINITE. As God himself is infinite, so all his attributes are infinite, and his mercy is infinite. Mercy pardons and forgives our sins which have been committed against an infinitely Holy God. Mercy saves and delivers us from infinite wrath in hell. And mercy has bestowed upon us infinite good - Christ! (Lk. 1:78). *"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"* (2 Cor. 9:15).

5. EVEN THE EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED IS AN ACT OF GOD'S SPECIAL, SOVEREIGN MERCY TOWARD HIS ELECT. The punishment of the reprobate in hell must be viewed from three directions. From God's point of view it is an act of justice, a vindication of his law and honor. Though God is merciful, he is also just and true. He will punish sin! From the point of view that the damned will have, the punishment of sin will be a matter of equity. They are made to suffer the proper wages of their sins. But from the standpoint of the redeemed, the punishment of the wicked will be seen as a matter of unspeakable mercy. What mercy it is that in the New Jerusalem *"there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither worketh abomination"* (Rev. 21:27). God's judgment upon our enemies is a matter of mercy to us. In hell he will put our enemies and his into a prison where they can do no more harm (Psa. 136:15; 143:12; Rev. 19:1-3). A merciful God our God is. Blessed be his name! But this great and merciful God, because he is merciful, will punish sin. He will rid his creation of all who defile it!

6. THE MERCY OF GOD IS IN CHRIST. “Mercy is displayed only in and through Christ. God out of Christ is a consuming fire” (John Gill). It is only in Christ that God proclaims his name to be “*gracious and merciful.*” Christ is the mercy-seat in whom sinners obtain mercy. If we would be saved, we must cast ourselves upon the mercy of God in Christ, as the publican did (Lk. 18:13). How can I describe the mercy of God in Christ? “*Thy mercy is great unto the heavens*” (Psa. 57:10). God’s mercy transcends our loftiest thoughts. “*For as high as heaven is above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him*” (Psa. 103:11). God’s mercy to sinners in Christ is infinite, beyond measure, and utterly indescribable. The Bible tells us that it is great mercy, rich mercy, abundant mercy, plenteous mercy, and that there are a multitude of mercies from God for sinners in Christ Jesus. I cannot begin to describe the mercy of God. But I can tell you something of the mercy I have found in Christ. **This is what I have experienced.** God’s preventing, prevenient mercy (Psa. 59:10) preserved me unto the appointed time of love and brought me to the place where he saved me by his grace. His forbearing mercy (Rom. 2:4) tolerated my rebellion and brought me to repentance. The Lord’s pardoning mercy (Isa. 55:6) has put away my sins by the blood of Christ. His comforting mercy (2 Cor. 1:3-4) sustains my soul in hope as he enables me to remember and trust his promises, his providence, his presence, and his propitiation. This is my soul’s comfort - “*Thy mercies are new every morning.*”

7. THE MERCY OF GOD SHALL BE CELEBRATED BY THE REDEEMED IN HEAVEN FOREVER (Psa. 89:1-2). Throughout the endless ages of eternity saved sinners will adore God’s eternal, covenant mercy (Heb. 8:12), effectual, redeeming mercy (Isa. 63:9), and his everlasting, saving mercy in Christ (Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:3). Give thanks to God! He has not forgotten mercy! His mercy endures forever (Ps. 136:1-3, 26).

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #20

The Gifts Of God

1 Timothy 6:17

It is the character of God to give. Paul tells us that the living God is one *“who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”* Isn't that amazing? God alone owns everything. God alone has the absolute rights of sovereignty and ownership over all things. Yet, God who owns and controls all things, *“giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”* This is another aspect of God's character that transcends reason. Truly, his thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways are not our ways! We have, by sin, attempted to rob God of everything. Yet he stoops to give us everything! This word of grace is addressed to “us”, to us who believe, to us who are born of God, to us who are God's elect. To the wicked and unbelieving, God has reserved nothing, but wrath. But to his own elect, the Lord God *“giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”* It is the character of God to give. And here are nine things God has freely given to every believer. If you now trust the Lord Jesus Christ as your only, all-sufficient Savior, God has given you these nine great gifts of grace.

1. THE GIFT OF HIS SON.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isa. 9:6). *“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift”* (2 Cor. 9:15). The supreme gift of God's love is the gift of his own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be our Savior (1 John 4:9-10). God gave his Son to be our Surety in the covenant of grace before the world began (Isa 49:8). He gave his Son to be our substitutionary Sacrifice upon the cross (John 3:16). And God gave his Son to be our Savior in the new birth. When a sinner is saved by the grace of God, Christ is given to him in all the fulness of his mediatorial

offices. God has given his Son to us to be our Prophet, Priest, and King. Is Christ ours? Has God given us his dear Son? If he has, then we have in Christ the guarantee of every other blessing (Rom. 8:32). Since God has not withheld from us his choicest treasure, the Darling of his heart, his only begotten and beloved Son, surely he will also freely give us all things.

2. THE GIFT OF HIS SPIRIT.

In the days of the Old Testament, God pardoned and justified his elect upon the grounds of the atonement Christ would make at his appointed time. On the basis of that same atonement, he also gave those Old Testament saints his Holy Spirit (Neh. 9:20; Isa. 63:11). Without the gift of the Spirit, none could have been born of God, believed on him, or walked with him. But in those days, the Holy Spirit was not yet poured out upon the nations of the world in demonstration and power. The Gentiles were without the Spirit of life, light, and holiness until Christ came. But now, since the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ, God has poured out his Spirit upon his elect in every nation.

- The Holy Spirit was God's ascension gift to his Son (Acts 2:33).
- The Holy Spirit is Christ's coronation gift to his church (John 16:7).
- And the Holy Spirit is a gift purchased by Christ for his own elect (Gal. 3:13-14).

Every blessing we receive from God comes to us through the merits and mediation of Christ. And all for whom Christ died shall have his Spirit. There is no such thing as a saved sinner who has not received the Holy Spirit.

3. THE GIFT OF LIFE.

The apostle Paul tells us that, *"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom. 6:23). Eternal life is the gift of God sovereignly and freely bestowed upon spiritually dead sinners through the merits of

Christ's blood atonement and the power of his grace (John 10:28; 17:2). ***"The wages of sin is death."*** That means, if we die, if we are lost, if we go to hell, it is our own fault. Hell is something every person earns for himself by wilful sin and unbelief. ***"But the gift of God is eternal life."*** That means, if we are saved, if we enter into heaven, it is God's fault, God's work, God's gift. Spiritual, eternal life is something God gives to sinners. ***And this gift is ours "through Jesus Christ his Son."*** Eternal life is given to sinners only through the mediation of Christ, the sinner's Substitute (Psa. 68:18-20).

4. THE GIFT OF FAITH.

Though faith in Christ is something for which every man is responsible, because God commands us to believe (1 John 3:23), and though faith is an act of the heart, faith is not the work of man's free will. Faith is the gift of God (Acts 3:16; Eph. 1:19; 2:8; Phil. 1:29; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:21). As God must give me breath before I can breathe, so he must give me faith before I can believe. Faith is not the cause and condition of grace. Faith in Christ is the gift and fruit of grace.

5. THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE.

We recognize that it is the duty of all men to repent. Every sinner is responsible to do so. God commands all to repent (Acts 17:30). But man by nature is so thoroughly in bondage to sin that he has neither the will nor the ability to repent. No one will ever repent of sin apart from a miracle of grace. As A. W. Pink wrote, "It is the Holy Spirit who illuminates the understanding to perceive the heinousness of sin, the heart to loathe it, and the will to repudiate it." If you are now in a state of repentance, it is because God has poured out the Spirit of his grace upon you (Zech. 12:10; Jer. 31:19; Acts 5:31; 11:18).

6. THE GIFT OF SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING.

Spiritual knowledge, discernment, and understanding is not the result of human intellect, but the gift of God (1 John 5:20). I do not refer to mere doctrinal knowledge. Though that is an essential element of spiritual understanding. But a man may have that and be lost. Spiritual understanding is the result of spiritual life in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit shining light into our hearts enabling us to see the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Though we do not see Christ with our physical eyes, he is a living reality to those who have spiritual understanding. We now know him, by the Spirit of God, through the Word of God. All who are born of God know him (John 17:3). We know his doctrine (1 John 2:20). We know his will (Prov. 3:5-6; John 15:15). And we know his character (Isa. 45:20-25). This spiritual understanding does not produce pride, but humility. It fires the affections, sanctifies the will, and elevates the mind.

7. THE GIFT OF HIS GRACE.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:4). Here he used the word "grace" in its widest sense. In this widest, biblical sense, grace includes all the benefits of Christ's merits and mediation, providential, spiritual, temporal, and eternal. Particularly, Paul is talking about God's saving grace bestowed upon his elect from eternity (Eph. 1:3). All grace is the gift of God!

- Regenerating grace (John 3:8)
- Justifying grace (Rom. 3:23-26)
- Pardoning grace (Isa. 43:25)
- Sanctifying grace (Heb. 10:10)
- Persevering grace (Phil. 1:6)
- Living grace (2 Cor. 12:9)
- Dying grace (Ps. 2:4-6)

8. THE GIFT OF ALL THINGS

Every believer, every child of God, every sinner saved by the grace of God needs to learn and rejoice in this fact - God has given us all things to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17; 3:4-5). All things in providence are ours. All things in grace are ours. All things in creation are ours. Be careful that you do not abuse what God has given you. Be certain that you are not brought into bondage to anything. But be assured that all things in God's creation were made for you to enjoy. And all things in eternity are ours in Christ (1 Cor. 3:21). Our everlasting reward in heaven is not something earned by our works, but the gift of God's free grace in Christ...

9. THE GIFT OF EVERLASTING, HEAVENLY GLORY

All that heaven is, all that it promises and affords, in all its fulness, glory and happiness is the gift of God, freely bestowed upon every saved sinner through the merits and mediation of Christ (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:11). It is our inheritance as the sons of God.

It is the character of God to give. The God we worship and serve with grateful hearts is "*the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.*" God has given all things to us. Let us now give our all to him (Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Chron. 29:13-14).

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #21

The Joy of God

Deuteronomy 30:9

Joy is complacency, satisfaction, and delight. The Lord our God is so kind, gracious, and good to his people that he makes joy a duty. He commands us to rejoice! *“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice”* (Phil. 4:4). He says, *“Rejoice evermore”* (1 Thess. 5:16). Paul tells us that God has given us the *“joy of faith”* (Phil. 1:25) and that our spiritual joy in Christ is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Joy is the commandment of God and the gift of God. But did you know that joy is also an attribute of God, an essential part of his character as God? As God is a God of holiness, justice, truth, and grace, he is also a God of joy.

Here are three texts of Scripture in which joy is attributed to the Lord our God. In Jeremiah 31 and 32 the Lord God proclaims some of his blessed covenant promises to his people (31:3, 31-34; 32:36-40). Then, in **Jeremiah 32:41**, he makes this the crowning promise of his covenant grace: *“Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good!”*

In **Deuteronomy 28:63** we read, *“The LORD rejoiced over you to do you good.”* In that chapter Moses declares to Israel all the blessings of God upon those who perfectly obey his commands, blessings which could never be won by any man, but Christ. Yet, since Christ has won them for his elect, by his obedience to God as their Representative, they may be and should be properly claimed by all who believe him. They are ours by his merit and by virtue of our union with him. Are you a believer? If so, read what God has promised to you (vv. 1-14) and rejoice! He blesses us in everything! In the latter part of the chapter we read of God’s curses upon all

who transgress his law. The ungodly, those who will not trust Christ alone for righteousness, standing upon their own merit, are cursed and condemned in everything. Then, in verse 63, we are told of God's joy. Now, read what the text says. As the Lord God rejoices in conferring upon his elect the benefits of his grace, so he rejoices in pouring out upon the wicked the punishment of his just wrath. Though *"he delighteth in mercy,"* and though judgment is his strange work, it is his work, and he joys in it. God rejoices in the display of his justice and holiness and in the display of his goodness and grace.

In **Deuteronomy 30:9**, we read, *"And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers:"* In chapters 29 and 30 Moses gives us *"the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded."* In their ultimate fulfillment, this covenant and the prophecies of these two chapters refer to the salvation of God's elect in Christ, as a comparison of Scripture with Scripture will readily show.

- Compare Deuteronomy 30:6 with Philippians 3:3.
- Compare Deuteronomy 30:14 with Romans 10:8.

So the message of verse nine is that the Lord God himself takes joy in the salvation of his own elect in the Lord Jesus Christ, his Son.

Be sure you understand that with God joy is an attribute of his glorious Being, not a passion. The joy of God is therefore eternal, infinite, perfect, and immutable. It is not a conditional, fluctuating joy, but an immutable, unchanging, unchangeable joy. Joy in God is his eternal complacency, satisfaction, and delight.

GOD REJOICES IN HIMSELF (1 Chron. 16:27). In his Psalm of thanksgiving to God, David said, *"Glory and honor are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place."* When God dwelt alone in the solitary perfection of his glorious Being, when nothing else existed except in God's infinite mind, there was joy

and gladness in his place. This needs to be recognized. God was perfect without us from eternity. And being perfect, he was joyful in himself. *The point is this* - God does not need angels, or men, or any other of his creatures to give him joy, satisfaction, complacency, and delight. God's joy is in himself. The three Persons of the Holy Trinity find joy in one another. It is right for God's joy to be in himself because he is perfect. And God always rejoices in perfection.

Because God always rejoices in perfection, we know that **GOD REJOICES IN ALL HIS WORKS** (Psa. 104:31). The psalmist declares, *"The glory of the Lord shall endure forever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works."* And the implication is that he will rejoice in all his works forever (Rev. 4:11). Everything that God is doing, has done, or shall hereafter do, is to him a matter of endless joy.

Though in his actions he appeared to have regretted making man upon the earth (Gen. 6:6), because he changed his course of action and poured out his wrath upon the fallen race in Noah's day, God himself did not change. He had not made a mistake! And even when he appears to be, in our eyes, disgusted with his works, he never is. Every work of his hand is perfect and always gives him joy.

God takes joy in his works of creation (Gen. 1:31; 2:2). God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them by the word of his power. And when he had finished his works, he not only rested from them, but rested in them too. He looked over all that he had made with joy, pleasure, and satisfaction, and pronounced that they were very good. But there is more - God still has joy in his creation, otherwise, he would not uphold all things by the word of his power. The fact that he maintains the universe in existence is evidence that he yet finds joy in that which he has made.

The Lord also rejoices in all his works of providence. When he speaks of his works of providence, our God says, *"I will*

do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). The works of providence, when we contemplate them, give us unspeakable pleasure and delight. Though God's ways and his works are past finding out, we see in providence the infinite depth of God's wisdom and knowledge, and rejoice (Rom. 11:33-36). And in that day when all things are made manifest, when all things are revealed in their true light, God's saints will shout his praise with unending, everlasting joy (Rev. 4:11). Imagine what delight, joy, complacency, and satisfaction God's works of providence must give to him! The works of providence are the works of his will and pleasure. He sees and knows their beauty, harmony, and connection. And he knows perfectly what the end results of his works will be - The salvation of his elect and the glory of his name (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:10-12)

The Lord God particularly delights in the great work of redemption devised by his infinite wisdom and wrought out by his dear Son. Our redemption by Christ and salvation by the grace of God through the almighty operations of his Holy Spirit gives joy to the triune God (Lk. 15:7, 9, 22-24). . Our redemption and salvation by Christ displays the great glory of God (Ps. 85:9-11). It is in the cross of Christ that we see the glory of God's love and mercy, grace and truth, holiness and justice, wisdom and faithfulness. God rejoices in his work of redemption because by it Christ obtained, upon the ground of strict justice, the salvation of his people, whom he loved with an everlasting love. This is what his heart was set upon from eternity. This is what he resolved to do before the worlds were made. This is the end for which he predestinated all things.

God also rejoices in his work of grace in the hearts of his people. His work of grace in us is our beauty, even the beauty of holiness, which the King greatly desires, by which his elect are made all glorious within (Song of Sol. 4:9-10; Ezek. 16:6-14). The righteousness of Christ imputed to us in justification makes the believer judicially appealing and beautiful before the Lord. And the righteousness nature of Christ imparted to the redeemed in

regeneration makes them all glorious within (Col. 1:27; 2 Pet., 1:4; 1 John 3:9). We are God's workmanship (Eph. 2:10), his masterpieces, in which he delights. We are the work of his hands, curiously and mysteriously wrought by him, in which he is glorified (Isa. 60:21).

GOD REJOICES IN HIS DEAR SON, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Without question, God finds joy in his Son as his equal in the Holy Trinity because Christ is himself God. But the blessed revelation of the gospel is the fact that God's joy, pleasure, delight, and satisfaction is in Christ as our Mediator (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Col. 1:18-19). There is only one Man in all the universe with whom God is absolutely, eternally, and immutably well-pleased. And that Man is Christ, our Mediator. God is pleased with Christ's obedience to Him as our Representative to fulfill all righteousness (Rom. 5:19). He is pleased with Christ's blood sacrifice for the satisfaction of his justice as our Substitute (Isa. 53:9-10). He is pleased with Christ's intercession as our Advocate (1 John 2:1-2). And God is pleased with every sinner who trusts Christ as his Savior. No one can please God by his works. But all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ please God by faith in him (Heb. 11:6). It is not our faith that pleases God, but Christ the Object of our faith. And God is pleased with us in Christ, our Mediator.

THE LORD OUR GOD REJOICES, DELIGHTS, TAKES PLEASURE IN, AND FINDS COMPLACENCY IN HIS PEOPLE FOR CHRIST'S SAKE. That is astonishing; but it is a fact. God takes pleasure in us, his people! We are his Hephzibah in whom he delights, his Beulah to whom he is married (Isa. 62:4-5). Therefore, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so the Lord rejoices over and takes pleasure in us (Psa. 147:11; 149:4). Imagine that! In the words of the covenant, God said, "*Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good*" (Jer. 31:41). And he does what he promised. He rejoices over us because we are united to Christ. **God the Father** rejoices in us as his covenant people from eternity. **God the Spirit** rejoices in us as the products of his grace. He revealed Christ to us

and in us. He assures us of our adoption. He has sealed to us the blessings of the covenant. And he preserves and keeps us in grace. And **God the Son** rejoices over us as his own peculiar people. Christ rejoiced over us before ever the earth was as the delight of his heart (Prov. 8:31). His joy in us sustained him as he endured the ignominy, agony, and death of the cross as our Substitute (Heb. 12:2). Our Savior rejoices in the conversion of his redeemed ones (Lk. 15:3-5). Every time a sinner is saved by grace, it is to the Son of God "*the day of the gladness of his heart*" (Song of Sol. 3:11). And in the last day we shall be to the Lord Jesus Christ, our dear Savior, his joy and crown of rejoicing (Psa. 45:13-15; Jude 24).

Can you imagine the blessedness of Christ's joy toward, in, and with his people? The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior, rejoices in us! Sinners though we are, being saved by grace, Christ finds in us a constant cause for joy! *He rejoices to...*

- Bestow upon us the benefits of grace and the glory of heaven.
- Make us a prosperous, spiritually prosperous people.
- Make all things work together for our good.

God's joy in us is full. It is abundant and overflowing. It is hearty and sincere. And it will remain forever. Our God has rejoiced in us. He now rejoices in us. And he shall forever rejoice in us. We are the joy of our God. "*The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing*" (Zeph. 3:17). If God so rejoices over us, surely we ought to rejoice in him (Ps. 35:27-28).

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson # 22

The Life of God

Ephesians 4:18

My purpose and desire in these studies of God's character is to assist (if God the Holy Spirit will be pleased to bless my efforts) the reader in beholding the supreme excellence, glory, and greatness of God. Oh, that we may be consumed by it! If we are, indeed, consumed with a sense of God's greatness and glory, we will do whatever we can to make him known. That is my heart's desire. I pray that God will be pleased to make himself known in this generation (1 Kgs. 18:36-39). We must know God. There is no salvation apart from the knowledge of God himself as he is revealed in Christ (John 17:3). It is the ever increasing desire of every believing sinner, saved by grace through faith in Christ, to know him (Phil. 3:10). And those who know him desire to make him known to others (Rom. 10:1-4).

Nothing is more suitable to that end than a study of the divine attributes. In Ephesians 4:18, Paul tells us that all unbelievers, all unregenerate men and women, live in the vanity of their minds, *"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."* But believers, those who are born again, are by the grace of God made partakers of the life of God.

I realize that it is impossible for us, with our puny, finite brains, to comprehend the life of God. I only hope in this study to set before you a sense of the infinite, incomprehensible greatness of God's life. The one thing that must be grasped is the fact that God is life; and apart from him there is no life.

GOD IS LIFE ESSENTIALLY. There are many forms of life in the universe. The lowest form of life is plant life. In animals there is a higher degree of life. Like us, animals breathe, see, smell, hear, taste, and feel. Like us, they eat and drink. But there is a much higher form of life in God's rational creatures, in angels and men. Angels and men have all the senses of life possessed by plants and animals; but we have other senses of life which set us apart from those lower creatures. Angels and men are rational creatures, capable of understanding, affection, and will.

However, there is still a much higher form of life among God's creatures, spiritual life. Spiritual life is that which is given to men and women in the new birth. It is a principle of life, grace, and holiness implanted in us by the Spirit of God. Spiritual life makes us partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4; Gal. 2:20). Spiritual life produces in the believer a nature that is as far above natural human life as human life is above plant life (Gal. 5:22-23). But even this highest form of life among God's creatures falls far short, infinitely short, of that life which is God. All creature life is derived life. God is life essentially. All creatures get life from God. God gets life from no one. He is life!

God is life in and of himself (John 5:26). As we have seen in previous studies, God alone is eternal and self-existent. God the Father has life in himself. And he has given to the Son, (not to the Son as God, but to the Son as Man), as our Mediator to have life in himself. God the Father is life. God the Son is life (John 1:1-4). And God the Spirit is life (Rev. 11:11 - *"The Spirit of life."*).

Because God is life in and of himself, God's life is totally free and independent. There is no cause for his life and nothing upon which his life is dependent. Our lives, both naturally and spiritually, depend entirely upon God (Deut. 30:20). He gives us life, physical life and spiritual life. And he sustains us in life, physical life and spiritual life. But God lives his own life. Our natural lives depend upon the union of our bodies to our souls. And our spiritual lives

depend upon the union of our souls to Christ (John 15:1-6). This union of our souls to Christ is a union of grace and of faith, an indissoluble union with the Son of God (Eph. 5:30-32). But the life of God depends upon nothing. His name is El-Shaddai, God all-sufficient, blessed and happy in himself forever.

The Lord our God is the one true and living God. Throughout the Scriptures, God's very glory by which he is exalted above and distinguished from the idols of men is his life.

1. The law was given by the authority of the living God (Deut. 5:26).
2. Joshua led Israel in triumph into the land of promise by the power of the living God (Josh. 3:10).
3. David's love and the thirst of his soul was for the living God (Psa. 42:1-2; 84:2).
4. Our Savior is the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16).
5. And as believers we are the temple of the living God.

All the idols of men are motionless, lifeless, and dead (Jer. 10:5, 10, 15, 16; Acts 14:15; 1 Thess. 1:9). Therefore, the worshippers of idols place great emphasis on dead ceremonies. But we believe, trust, worship, and submit to the living God (Rev. 10:5-6).

When I was a boy, a professor at a religious college near my hometown started a foolish lie that caught the nation and spread like wildfire. He said, "God is dead!" Well, that wretch is now dead. His blasphemy did not even disturb God. Some say, "God is alive." But that is not true either. God is not alive. God is life! God is life essentially.

GOD IS LIFE ETERNALLY (1 John 5:20). God is life without beginning, without succession, and without end. The eternity of God is a subject that baffles human reason. We cannot think in terms of eternity. But God is eternal. His life is eternal. The

eternality of life in God implies many things: His simplicity, his spirituality, his independence, etc. But for the purposes of this study, let me direct your attention to just two things that are revealed in the eternality of God.

1. **Immutability** (Psa. 102:26-27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; James 1:17) - Only God is eternal. And only God is immutable. God who is eternal life must also be immutable life. He never experiences any change of any kind. Blessed be his name! Because God is immutable his purpose is steadfast; his promises are sure; and his people are secure. Eternality and immutability go hand in hand. And eternality and immutability go hand in hand with...
2. **Immortality** (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16). Angels are immortal because God made them so. The souls of men are immortal because God made them so. The bodies of the saints shall be made, like Christ's human body, immortal, because God will make them so in the resurrection. Even the bodies of the damned in hell will be made immortal by God. However, God alone has immortality in and of himself, because God alone has life in himself eternally.

GOD IS LIFE EFFICIENTLY (Psa. 36:9). God is the source, the Spring, the Author, and the Giver of life. Life in its lowest form and in its highest form is the gift of God. And God is totally sovereign over all life. He gives life to the grass; and he takes it away (Gen. 1:11-12; Isa. 40:7). He gives life to the beasts; and he takes it away (Gen. 1:20-25; Psa. 104:29). He gives life to men upon the earth; and he takes it away at his pleasure (Gen. 2:7; Psa. 68:20; Heb. 9:27). When he is pleased to do so, God can make a jackass talk and reason like a man (Num. 22:28). And when he is pleased to do so, God can cause a brilliant, powerful man to eat grass like an ox, grow feathers like an eagle, and his nails to become claws like a bird's (Dan. 4:32-33). God is totally sovereign

over all life. He alone can give life. No man can make a living fly. He might as easily create a world. And no man can destroy a fly. He might as easily destroy the world. As God is sovereign over all natural, physical life, so he is sovereign over all spiritual, eternal life.

Spiritual life is the free gift of God (John 5:21, 25; 11:25; Rom. 8:2). All men by nature, though alive physically, are dead spiritually, dead in trespasses and in sins. They cannot give themselves life. No one can give what he does not have. It is God alone who gives us life. He gave us life legally by the sacrifice of Christ (Rom. 7:4). He gave us life spiritually by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:1-6). The new birth is a resurrection from the dead (John 5:25), the first resurrection over which the second death has no power (Rev. 20:6). He gives us life continually by the power of his grace (1 Pet. 1:5).

And eternal life, so often spoken of in the Scriptures as that which the saints shall enjoy forever, is the gift of God's free and sovereign grace (Rom. 6:23). It is our predestined inheritance, promised before the world began (Eph. 1:11 Acts 13:48; Tit. 1:2). It is our purchased possession (Eph. 1:14), purchased for us by the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:12). It is the gift of God to all who trust his dear Son (John 17:2; 10:28; 1 John 5:12). Because every aspect of eternal life is the free gift of God's sovereign grace in Christ, all who believe the gospel message of salvation by grace alone must reject the ridiculous notion that there are degrees of reward in heaven!

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Colossians 3:1-3

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #23

The Sufficiency of God

Exodus 6:3

When the Lord was about to deliver Israel out of Egyptian bondage, he spoke to Moses and said, *"I am the LOR11/23/2007* When he was about to save his people, God revealed himself by the name, Jehovah, which means Deliverer, Savior, God who saves. And when he sent Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob out to follow him in strange lands, he appeared to them by the name God almighty. That name, "God Almighty," is translated in the margin of our Bibles, "El-Shaddai," which means "God Almighty," identifying our God as One whose power is infinite and uncontrollable.

This name, "El-Shaddai," however, speaks of much more than God's omnipotent power. It suggests the idea of "**God who is a Nourisher.**" In fact, El-Shaddai is said to bless his people with *"blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb"* (Gen. 49:25). As a mother nourishes her children with the milk of her breast, so the Lord our God, El-Shaddai, tenderly nourishes his own elect with the fullness of his Being.

El-Shaddai also means, "**God who pours out.**" He not only nourishes us, supplying everything we need to sustain us and keep us, but he also pours out upon us all the blessings of his grace. Our God is a fountain overflowing and gushing out with grace that flows to us with constant fullness, like a mighty river from the throne of God.

And El-Shaddai means, "**God All-Sufficient.**" The Lord our God is so great and glorious that he has all sufficiency in himself,

for himself, of himself, so that he needs nothing to make him happy and complete. And El-Shaddai is God All-Sufficient for his people. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as they made their pilgrimage through this world, needed nothing but God whose name is Sufficient! That person truly lives by faith who lives in the confidence that he needs nothing but God, whose name is El-Shaddai - God All-Sufficient. This attribute of God, his sufficiency, implies three things about his great and glorious Being.

GOD'S ALL-SUFFICIENCY IMPLIES SELF-SUFFICIENCY, AND INDEPENDENCE. In other words, God needs nothing from anyone. Preachers often portray God as a pathetic being who is in desperate need of man, as one who cannot be happy and satisfied without man, and one whose will, work, and glory greatly depends upon man. But from the beginning God revealed himself as El-Shaddai, God Almighty and All-Sufficient. God is so infinitely great that he stands in need of nothing and is in need of no one. The self-existent God is the self-subsistent God. He is perfect, complete, happy and satisfied in himself. We can add nothing to him. And we can take nothing from him. He is God (Rom. 11:35-36).

John Gill wrote, "God in his divine persons, God Father, Son, and Spirit, have enough within themselves, to give the utmost, yea, infinite complacency, delight, and satisfaction among themselves and to one another." From eternity, "the Father delighted in the Son, *the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person;*' the Son in the Father, before whom he was always rejoicing, when as yet no creature existed; and both in the blessed Spirit, proceeding from them (see Prov. 8:30). For creation adds nothing at all to the perfection and happiness of God, nor makes the least alteration in him."

There is no vacuum in God, which we must fill. He lacks nothing that must be supplied by his creatures. We stand in need of God. He alone supplies our every need and supports us in life. By him we consist. In him we live, and move, and have our being. He

upholds us by the word of his power. But God needs nothing from us. God All-Sufficient is God Self-Sufficient!

The services we perform for God in faith are not for his benefit, but for ours (Acts 17:24-25). In the Old Testament the ordinances of worship were for man's benefit, not God's (Psa. 50:7-15). All those sacrifices, ceremonies, rituals, priests, and holy days were for the instruction, comfort, peace, and edification of God's people. But God received nothing by them. The ordinances of worship in the New Testament are for the same purpose. God gains nothing by what we do. Our worship, service, and obedience to God does not enrich him. They enrich us, but not him. By these things we are led into communion with the living God and brought into the enjoyment of his gracious presence.

- Our praise does not benefit God. It benefits us.
- Our prayers do not benefit God. They benefit us. The throne of grace was set up, not for God, but for us (Heb. 4:16).
- Our sacrifices, services, and acts of obedience to God do not benefit him. They benefit us (Job 22:2-3; 35:7-8; Lk. 17:10; Tit. 3:8).

Even the righteousness, obedience, and sacrifice of Christ as our Substitute added nothing to the perfection of God's glorious being, but was altogether for our benefit (Psa. 16:2-3). His obedience was for us (Rom. 5:19). His death was for us (1 John 3:16). His resurrection was for us (Rom. 4:25). His exaltation is for us (John 17:2). His intercession is for us (Rom. 8:34). His second coming is for us (1 Thess. 14:13-18). Even His judgment in the last day is for us (Isa. 14:1; Rev. 18:24).

Not only is it true that we can never add anything to God, but no creature can ever take anything from him either. The sinful deeds of the wicked do not in anyway diminish the happiness, perfection, and glory of God (Job 35:6-8). God is so

infinitely great, so thoroughly self-sufficient that no creature can add anything to him, take anything from him, hinder his work, impede his purpose, or in anyway alter him. God needs nothing from anyone; and loses nothing to anyone!. His name is El-Shaddai - God All-Sufficient!

BECAUSE HE IS ALL-SUFFICIENT, GOD IS ABLE TO SUPPLY ALL THE NEEDS OF HIS PEOPLE. God is able to do whatever he pleases. He is able to fulfill all his promises. He is able to accomplish all his decrees. And he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Nothing is too hard for our God. He who sent manna from heaven every day to feed a hungry nation for forty years can feed you. He who caused water to gush out of a rock in the desert can refresh you. He who caused a pair of shoes to walk thousands of miles for forty years and remain new, and caused a coat to last all that time without the least wear, can clothe you. He who caused an ax to swim can keep you afloat. The name of our God is El-Shaddai, God All-Sufficient!

We see something of God's infinite sufficiency in the physical world around us. In his good providence, God gives life and breath to all things (Acts 17:25). He breathed into Adam the breath of life and gives the breath of life to all the sons of Adam. He is called the God of our life (Psa. 42:8), because we get life from him. And he supports, maintains, and preserves the life he has given from his own sufficiency as long as it pleases him (Job 10:11-12; 12:10; Psa. 66:9). It is God alone who provides for all men all the necessities of life and supplies the needs of all his creatures daily (Psa. 104:27-28; 145:15; 147:9). Out of his great, infinite sufficiency, in the exercise of his wisdom and power, our great God and heavenly Father totally rules the universe (Psa. 22:28; Prov 8:15-16; Matt. 10:29-30). So great is God's infinite, incomprehensible sufficiency that though he made all things, sustains all things, provides for all things, and rules all things, his sufficiency is never diminished!.

But, above all else, we know El-Shaddai to be God All-Sufficient because we have experienced his all sufficient grace. El- Shaddai is the God of all grace. He is able to cause all grace to abound toward us; and he does. He is able to supply all our needs; and he does, out of that rich and glorious plenitude and all-sufficiency that is in him, by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ is an all-sufficient Mediator (John 1:14, 16; Col. 1:18-19; 2:9-10).
2. Christ is the Mediator of an all-sufficient covenant (Eph. 1:3).
3. And God bestows upon his elect all-sufficient grace in Christ (2 Cor. 12:9).
- 4.

When he says, *“My grace is sufficient for thee,”* he means for every believing sinner to understand that his grace in Christ is sufficient to justify, pardon, and cleanse him, keep him in life, sustain him in death, bring him up to heaven, and present him faultless before the presence of his glory in the last day! The name of God our Savior is El-Shaddai - God All-Sufficient. He is able to supply all our needs. And he does (Gen 22:7-14).

GOD’S ALL SUFFICIENCY ALSO IMPLIES THAT HE IS PERFECT. One who lacks nothing, needs nothing, to whom nothing can be given, and from whom nothing can be taken away is perfect. God is perfect in his nature (Matt. 5:48). He is immutable (James 1:17), omniscient (Job 37:16), wise (Rom. 11:33), omnipotent (Isa. 40:26-28; 59:1), holy (Lev. 11:44), and pure (1 John 1:5). His perfection is displayed in all his works (Deut. 32:3-4). Whether we speak of creation, redemption, providence, or grace, we are compelled to joyfully confess with the psalmist, *“As for God, his way is perfect”* (Psa. 18:30). (See Eccles. 3:14). And before he is finished with us, if we are his, God will make us perfect, too (1 Pet. 5:10). We are perfect now positionally and representatively in Christ Eph. 1:6; Col. 1:12; 2:9-10). And soon we shall be perfect personally and experimentally with Christ (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:1-

3). We have confidence that it shall be so, because the name of our God is El-Shaddai!

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #24

The Blessedness of God

1 Timothy 6:13-16

If God is all-sufficient in himself, as we have seen, he must be and is happy and blessed. The gospel we preach and by which we are saved is called *“the glorious gospel of the blessed God”* (1 Tim. 11). And here, in 1 Timothy 6:13-16, Paul tells us that in his time Christ shall show all men the glory of the triune God *“who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting.”* The Scriptures frequently ascribe blessedness to God. He is called *“the blessed One,”* and *“the blessed God.”* Christ is called *“the Son of the Blessed.”* He who is the Creator of all things is *“God blessed forever”* (Rom. 9:5). The blessedness of God is his infinite, eternal, unchangeable happiness and pleasure in himself. As I am using the word “blessed” in this study, and as it is commonly used in the Scriptures, it means “happy”. The blessedness of God is his happiness. The perfection of his Being is his happiness.

Why is God happy? What is the source of his blessedness? Paul seems to equate God’s blessedness with his sovereign, universal, and endless power and dominion, and with that incomparable light, glory, and majesty with which he is arrayed.

The Lord our God is *“the Blessed and Only Potentate.”*

Such titles belong to God alone. To ascribe these titles to a man is as idolatrous as it would be to call a mere man God! God alone is the only Potentate. He has power over all, but is under the power of none. And his is no delegated power. He is higher than the highest,

the most high God. And he sovereignly rules over angels, and men, and all things by right as the Creator and Owner of all. "*Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world?*" (Job 34:13). He is God! "He has the charge of the earth, and disposes of the whole world, and all persons and things in it; but has authority for it of himself...He has no rival, competitor, nor partner with him in his throne. He is not accountable to any, nor controlled by any" (Gill). He who is "*the King of kings and Lord of lords*" is the only blessed and happy Potentate. And he will always continue as such.

It is God "*who only hath immortality.*" He gives life and immortality to angels and men. But he only has it in and of himself. Mortality mars the happiness of the greatest, most powerful monarchs of the earth, but not the Monarch of all things (Psa. 82:6-8).

Next we are told that God is the Blessed One "*dwelling in light.*" He is clothed with such light and splendor, such dazzling and brilliant glory, that no man can approach him or gaze upon him. "*God is Light*" (1 John 1:5). His light, his glory, his blessedness is not the result of just one of his attributes, but the consummation of them all. The glory of God is the perfection of his Being. And the perfection of his Being is his blessedness.

GOD IS HIS OWN BLESSEDNESS. God's blessedness is entirely within and of himself. He receives none from his creatures. Nothing can add to his blessedness. And nothing can diminish it. His blessedness is, like himself, unchangeable. He is "*over all God blessed forever!*" Though he is sometimes represented as being grieved, wearied, or provoked to anger, such expressions are only representations to us of God's disapproval of man's sin. They must never be understood of any change taking place in God (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). Primarily, God's blessedness consists of two things.

First, God's blessedness lies in his freedom from all evil.

There is nothing evil in God. And nothing evil touches him. He is entirely free from the evil of evils, sin. And he is entirely free from all the consequences of sin (Job 35:6-8). Sin is the source of all disorders, disasters, and calamities that befall God's creatures. Sin has destroyed the blessedness of all the fallen angels and brought them into a state of misery. And sin has brought misery upon all our race. The universal proof of the fall and depravity of the human race is the universality of sorrow, pain, sickness, and death. Contrary to popular opinion, bad things do not happen to good people! Even God's saints in this world have their happiness marred by sin. Though we are chosen of God the Father, redeemed by God the Son, called by God the Spirit and saved by grace, our blessedness in this world can never be complete. The sin which dwells in us mars our peace, disrupts our comfort, quenches our joy, and causes us to cry continually, "*O wretched man that I am!*" But God has no iniquity, no darkness, no sin to eclipse his blessedness (Deut. 32:4). God is so thoroughly blessed that he can never even be tempted with sin (James 1:13). God is out of the reach of all evil. This is his blessedness. He is not affected by sin. He cannot be tempted to sin. And the evil consequences of sin cannot reach him. It neither hurts him, nor damages his blessedness. God's knowledge is so great that he cannot become unhappy by making a mistake. His wisdom is so great that he cannot be deceived, or drawn into anything that would be a detriment to his blessedness. And his power is so great that he cannot be subjected to anything that might interrupt his blessedness. God's blessedness lies in his total freedom from all evil!

Second, his blessedness is his possession of all good.

Our Lord Jesus said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35). That being true, God must be the most blessed, for he receives good from none and gives good to all. God has all good in himself. And he is the Fountain of good to his creatures. All good things come from him. Whatever it is that may be thought

necessary to happiness is in God fully and perfectly. There is nothing that can be thought of that is essential to happiness that God does not possess in infinite measure. Is happiness grandeur and dominion? *"His kingdom ruleth over all."* He is the most high God, blessed forever! Is happiness wealth and riches? God says, *"The gold is mine, and the silver is mine"* (Hag. 2:8). He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. And all the treasures of the earth and sea are his. Is wisdom happiness? He is the all-wise God. His name is Wisdom. Is strength and power happiness? God is omnipotence. Is happiness found in pleasure? In God's presence is the fullness of joy. At his right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psa. 16:11). Is happiness fame and renown? God is known in all the earth? All his works praise him. All his saints bless him. All his angels adore him. Everything that breathes or wiggles submits to his rule and honors him. Is knowledge happiness? God knows all things. Nothing can be hidden from him. Is freedom and independence happiness? Then truly God is blessed and happy, for he alone is totally free and independent.

"Add to all this, that his blessedness endures forever. He is God blessed forever, from everlasting to everlasting. Could his happiness cease, or be known that it would, it would detract from it, even for the present. But this can no more cease than his Being" (Gill). God is blessed forever!

GOD IS THE SOURCE AND CAUSE OF ALL BLESSEDNESS. Look up to heaven, and see the happy angels around his throne in their blessed habitation. God created them. He made them the happy creatures they are. And when one third of the heavenly hosts fell into misery, it was God who kept those heavenly creatures in their blessed estate, according to his own sovereign will and pleasure.

Though at any given time or place in this world God's elect are few in number, they are the blessed ones of the earth. as the people of his choice. *"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).

All the temporal happiness of men in this world is the work of God (Psa. 68:18-19). All the gifts of happiness in this world are bestowed upon undeserving men and women by the goodness of God through the exalted God-man Mediator, Christ Jesus. We have our being and are preserved in life by the blessed God. All the necessities and comforts of life are but gifts of his goodness. All health, wealth, and increases of family, provision, and property are from God's bountiful hand. It is God who fills our basket with good things. What brute beasts we must be when we receive so much good from the blessed God, and yet fail to offer thanks and praise to him.

All spiritual blessings have been bestowed upon God's elect by him (Psa. 68:21). All men are blessed of God in measure in time. But God's elect are blessed of him without measure, and that from eternity (Eph. 1:3). God our Father bestowed every blessing of grace upon us in the covenant of grace before the world began. And in time, he brings every blessing of grace to us by the working of his mighty power (2 Tim. 1:9-10). What a happy, blessed people we are! Grace has made us so (Rom. 4:6-8; 5:1, 11; 8:32; Deut. 7). God the Father is ours in all the fullness of his Being (Ps. 68:20; 115:3). Christ is ours; and all the blessings of grace and goodness is in him (Eph. 1:4-13). The Holy Spirit is ours, and all the graces of life by him (Eph. 1:14; Gal. 5:22-23). God has given us his Word and the ordinances of worship, which are the means of our ever increasing blessedness. And hereafter, he will bless us with eternal happiness. What a blessed hope we have! If all this blessedness comes from God, how blessed God himself must be!

The Lord God himself is our blessedness (Psa. 73:23-26). Our greatest blessedness and happiness is in possessing him and being conformed to him as he is revealed in Christ. The

believer's blessedness is begun in regeneration, when we are created new in the image of Christ, being made partakers of the divine nature. Our blessedness here consists of communion with God, obedience to him, and the growing knowledge of him. And our blessedness will be perfected in that day when we shall awake in his likeness (Psa. 17:15). O happy, happy blessed eternity! The blessedness of the New Jerusalem shall be this - The tabernacle of God shall be with men. The Lord God will dwell with us and we with him in perfect harmony. In eternity we will enjoy everlasting, uninterrupted communion with the Triune God! We will enjoy endless pleasures in the Divine presence! Soon, we shall see God, our Redeemer, face to face. We shall be with him. We shall be like him. We shall know him. This is our blessedness. And it is the gift of the blessed God.

WE OUGHT EVER TO ASCRIBE BLESSEDNESS TO THE LORD OUR GOD. We cannot add anything to God's blessedness. But we can ascribe blessedness to him. And we ought to do so (Psa. 103:1-3; 104:1; Eph. 1:3). Here are four ways by which we can and should bless the Lord our God.

1. **Believe Him.** Faith is the highest form of praise.
2. **Praise Him.** To praise God is to congratulate him for his greatness and his blessedness.
3. **Give Thanks To Him.** To bless God is to give thanks to him for all that he has done and for all that he is.
4. **Serve Him.** Lip service is a mockery if it is not backed by life service. We bless God best when we live for his glory. Every deed done for God is to bless God. Every sacrifice made for Christ is to bless Christ.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson #25

The Righteousness of God

Matthew 6:33

That person who spends all his time, energy, and care seeking nothing more than mundane, earthly, perishing things is a fool. Even the necessities of life, food, drink, clothing, and shelter for the body, are not worthy of great concern to eternity bound men and women with immortal souls. Is man no more than a brute beast that he should spend his life seeking the grass of the earth? No! Our Lord Jesus Christ says to you and me, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*"

"The kingdom of God"

"The kingdom of God" is the gospel of Christ and the worship of God through the ministry of the Word (**Cf.** Malt. 21:43; Mk. 1:14; Lk. 4:43; 9:2, 60; 16:16). Our Lord is telling us that the worship of God, the preaching of the gospel, and the ministry of the Word are the most important of all things. The kingdom of God is to be diligently sought after and constantly attended. It is to be preferred to our necessary food and clothing, and certainly to the riches and pleasures of this world. To neglect the worship of God is to neglect your own soul, to neglect life, and to despise God's Son, his grace, and his salvation. To prefer anything to the worship of God is idolatry. And idolatry will cost a person his immortal soul.

"The kingdom of God," ultimately, is that kingdom of glory which God has prepared for his own elect from the foundation of the world. This is eternal life. And it is the free gift of God to all who trust his Son. If we are wise, we will seek eternal life above all other things.

The only hope of entrance into the kingdom of God is ***"His Righteousness,"*** that is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. In Matthew 6:33, our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that the one thing we must seek, while we live upon this earth, is the righteousness of God, without which no one can enter into the kingdom of God. But what do we know about the righteousness of God? If we must have the righteousness of God in order to enter into the kingdom of God, we would be wise to search the Scriptures

and seek to know what we can about the righteousness of God. It is described in *four ways* in the Scriptures:

1. It is called "The Righteousness of God" (Rom. 1:16-17).

The gospel of Christ reveals the righteousness of God's nature. It reveals that righteousness is an attribute of God, essential to his Being as God. Here Paul is talking about the rightness of God's Being. As we have seen already, all that God is, all that he does, all that he requires, and all that he accepts is right. When the Bible declares that God is righteous, the meaning is, "God is right." *"Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" (Psa. 97:2).*

2. It is called "*The Righteousness of the law*" (Rom. 2:26).

The righteousness of the law is that perfect obedience which God requires from men. The law of God is holy, just, and good, for it is a revelation of God's righteous character. The law could never give or produce righteousness. But the law does reveal righteousness in God; and it demands righteousness from men.

3. It is described as The Righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:21-22).

The righteousness of Christ denotes more than the absolute perfection of his nature as God. It speaks of his perfect obedience to the law as our Representative and his satisfaction of the law by his death as our Substitute. The righteousness of Christ is that righteousness which Christ accomplished for his people, by which we enter into the kingdom of God.

4. And It is set forth as The Righteousness of faith (Rom. 10:6).

This is the righteousness which we receive by faith in Christ. It is the righteousness of God, the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. Righteousness is God's attribute, his requirement, his provision, and his gift.

With these things in mind, read Matthew 5:20. Here our Master is addressing his own disciples, who seemed to stand in awe before the scribes and Pharisees, the great religious leaders of the Jewish world. He pointed to those highly esteemed, devout men, and said, *"Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."*

The scribes were the religious scholars, the theologians, who copied and expounded the Scriptures. They gave their lives to this one great work for God and man. Yet, our Lord said, *"Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes, you cannot be saved!"* The Pharisees were the strictest sect of the Jews. None exceeded the Pharisees in outward morality, obedience to the law, saying of prayers, Scripture memory, personal righteousness, and public approval. Yet, the Son of God declares, *"Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, you cannot be saved!"*

What is the meaning of those words? Is our Lord telling us that we must do more and be better than the scribes and Pharisees? Is he telling us that we must seek to gain a greater measure of personal righteousness and holiness than they possessed? Not at all. In fact, he is saying just the opposite. Our Lord is declaring the utter impossibility of gaining favor with God on the basis of our own personal righteousness. He is telling us that there has never been one son, or daughter of Adam on this earth good enough, righteous enough, holy enough to inherit, or inhabit, the kingdom of heaven. There is not now, and there never shall be, one person in heaven who got there because he was righteous, holy, and good upon the earth. *"Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity"* (Psa. 39:5). *"There is none that doeth good, no, not one"* (Psa. 14:1-3; Rom. 3:9-20). Somehow, we must get the idea of personal goodness out of our minds, and the very word 'good' out of our vocabulary, when we think or speak of any human being in God's sight. God declares that *"every imagination (and desire) of the thoughts of (every man's) heart is only evil continually"* (Gen. 6:6).

The very best men who have lived in this world all lamented and mourned over the evil of their nature (Job 9:20; 40:3-5; 42:5-6; Psa. 51:1-5; Isa. 6:1-5; Rom. 7:18-24).

We are all sinners by nature, incapable of performing righteousness to any degree. Our only hope of salvation is the righteousness of another, even the righteousness of God, This is a subject of immense importance. The very name of God our Savior is *"The LORD our Righteousness!"* If we would be saved we must

know and possess the righteousness of God. Important and vital as this subject is, it is a subject about which almost the entire religious world in which we live is totally ignorant (Rom. 10:1-4).

It is my prayer that this study will, by the blessing of God's Spirit, give the reader a clear understanding of the gospel's good news, which is the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. Do what you will, without the righteousness of God that is in Christ Jesus, you cannot enter heaven. *"Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."* I want to show you from the Scriptures how a sinner can obtain the righteousness of God and be forever accepted in his sight. In order to do so, I want to show you four things.

RIGHTEOUSNESS LOST

By the sin and fall of our father Adam we all suffered a threefold loss of righteousness, which cannot be denied. The preacher said, "Lo, this only have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Eccles. 7:29).

When Adam sinned in the garden man lost his righteous nature. Man before the fall was more than innocent. He was holy, righteous, good, and pleasing to God (Gen. 1:31). But after the fall, man was sinful, guilty, corrupt, repulsive to, and condemned by God (Rom. 5:12). Every faculty of man's being was corrupted, defiled, twisted and deformed by the fall. He lost all moral, spiritual goodness. Fallen man has a perverted heart, a corrupt will and a vile nature. There is no righteousness, goodness, or possibility of goodness in any of us by nature. In our "flesh dwelleth no good thing." "So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 7:18; 8:8).

At the moment Adam sinned, we also lost all legal righteousness before God (Rom. 5:19). Because he sinned, Adam was put out of the Garden, separated from God. And we, being made sin, are by nature separated from God. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you" (Isa. 59:2). Man, by reason of his sin, is so far off from God that he cannot ever, of his own will, or by his own works, return to God (1 Tim. 6:15-16). Unless God himself intervenes to bridge the gulf between himself and fallen man, man must be eternally separated from God in hell. Having broken the law by sin,

we have no legal righteousness, no legal grounds of acceptance with God.

And fallen man has lost all understanding of righteousness. When man had righteousness before God, he understood that he had it by the gift of God in creation. And he never gloried in his righteousness. But even since he lost righteousness, man has thought that he has righteousness, pretended to have it, and boasted of it as a grounds of acceptance with God. The fig leaves that Adam and Eve made for themselves after the fall, the bloodless sacrifice that Cain offered to God, and the prayer of the Pharisee (Gen. 3:7; 4:3; Luke 18:11-12) exemplify the proud, self-righteousness resident in the depraved hearts of fallen men. Being ignorant both of the righteousness of God and his own sinfulness, fallen man goes about seeking to establish his own righteousness (Rom. 10:1-3; Isa. 64:6). But it is an impossible task. When man has done all that he can, to the utmost of his ability, our Savior says, You will have to do better than that "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

RIGHTEOUSNESS REQUIRED - What does God require of man? How good does a man have to be to get into heaven? He must be as good as God. God requires perfect righteousness. But here is the problem - Man's definition of righteousness depends entirely upon his definition and understanding of God. And few have seen God's glorious holiness (Isa. 6:1-6; Job 42:5-6). Once a sinner has been made to see God's holiness, he cries, "Who can stand in the presence of the holy Lord God?"

The Fact is no son of Adam can ever stand in God's presence upon his own merit, for we are all cursed (Gal. 3:10). God is so holy that he charges his angels with folly, so holy that the heavens are not pure in his sight, so holy that when he found sin upon his own beloved Son he forsook him and killed him! With Isaiah, the sinner convinced of God's holiness, that holiness that demanded the death of his own dear Son when he was made to be sin, cries, "Woe is me! I am cut off! And I dwell among a people who are all cut off, unclean, undone, and without hope!"

Only one who is himself God can stand in the presence of God and please him (Psa. 24:35; Matt. 17:5). That righteousness which God requires only God can perform. But, thank God, blessed

be his name forever, according to his own Word, there is good news - There is a Man who is himself God who has magnified the law and made it honorable. He has brought in everlasting righteousness. And that Man-God is Jesus Christ our Lord.

RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED - The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world for the purpose of fulfilling all righteousness. And he did it. He brought in, established, and finished the work of righteousness for all God's elect by his obedience to the Father as our Representative. It is this righteousness, the righteousness of God, that is revealed and proclaimed by the gospel (Rom. 3:24-28). *The gospel of Christ reveals and proclaims a fourfold message of grace to sinners:*

1. Perfect Atonement (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13)

The Lord Jesus Christ took our sins upon himself and paid for them, completely satisfying the justice of God's holy law for all his people.

2. Perfect righteousness

It is not enough for the sinner to be pardoned. We are required to keep the law of God - "*Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them*" (Gal. 3:10). This, too, Christ has done for us. His faithful obedience to God is the righteousness of God fulfilled for us (Rom. 3:19-22; 5:19).

3. Perfect imputation

Christ has given us light and understanding by the gospel, enabling us to see and receive the imputation of his righteousness by faith in him (Rom. 1:16-17; 4:3-8, 20-25). Righteousness is sovereignly imputed to chosen, redeemed sinners in justification. Yet, it is received by faith in Christ. That is to say, the regenerate soul looks to Christ alone for righteousness. Righteousness is not imputed to us upon the basis of our faith, but upon the basis of Christ's faithfulness as our Representative (Rom. 3:22). This imputed righteousness is received by faith as we look to Christ for it. This righteousness is imputed to us without works (Gal. 2:16). And this imputation of righteousness is irrevocable (Rom. 4:8).

3. Perfect liberty (Rom. 8:1-4)

Since justice has been satisfied, the law has been honored, and righteousness has been imputed to God's elect, we are now completely freed from all possibility of condemnation. Where there is no debt, there is no liability. Where there is no sin, there is no curse. Where there is no guilt, there is no fear.

RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPARTED

Righteousness is imputed to the believer in justification. That is our standing before God. Righteousness is imparted to God's elect in regeneration by the irresistible power and grace of God the Holy Spirit. That is our experience of grace (2 Pet. 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 3:10-12). Imparted righteousness does not mean that the believer is without sin, or that the old Adamic nature is changed, or that any work of the believer is accepted before God upon its own merit. I presume that any who read these lines are fully aware of these things. I know that every believer is (1 John 1:8, 10). We love the law of God. We love the truth of God. We love holiness. But we know, by daily, bitter experience, the evil of our own hearts. Every child of God in this world confesses with Paul, *"I know that in me, that is in my flesh, there is nothing good."*

Yet, the Word of God clearly teaches that the regenerate soul, the believer has a new, righteous, holy nature imparted to him by the grace and power of God the Holy Spirit in the new birth which cannot sin (1 John 3:9). That person who is born of God is a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Those who are born of God walk in the Spirit, living by faith in Christ (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16-23). Because there is in every believer these two opposing natures, the flesh and the Spirit, sin and righteousness, there is in the heart of every regenerate person a constant warfare, a warfare that will never end until the body of flesh is consumed in death (Rom. 7:14-24). The flesh will never surrender. Yet, the Spirit reigns. And those who are born of God mind the things of God (Rom. 8:5). Believers are sanctified by grace. In the tenor of their lives the saints of God live as saints in this world. Believers love Christ and one another. Believers identify themselves with Christ and his church. Believers are men and women of honesty and integrity. Believers hate sin and long to be free of it. Believers are generous, kind, and merciful. Believers are committed, sold out to, Christ, lock, stock, and barrel. Believers will continue in the faith, clinging to Christ alone as *Jehovah-tsidkenu*, *"THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,"* to the end. Let us ever renounce all personal righteousness as filthy rags and submit ourselves to the righteousness of God - *"For Christ is*

the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth”
(Rom. 10:4).

Until the righteousness of God which is by the faithful obedience of Christ is proclaimed, the gospel has not been preached. And any gospel that offers sinners any other ground of righteousness is a false gospel.

The Attributes of God

Lesson #26

The Righteousness of God Revealed

Romans 1:14-17

Paul recognized his place and his responsibility in the kingdom of God. Being called, gifted, and sent of God to preach the gospel, he looked upon his work as a gospel preacher as a great, indescribably honorable privilege (Eph. 3:8). Yet, he understood that the privilege God had given him was the weightiest, most awesome responsibility in the world (1 Cor. 9:16). He looked upon the preaching of the gospel as a debt he was honor bound to pay. He says, *"I am a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise."* Therefore, he gave his life to the work of the gospel (Rom. 1:1). This man was not a religious professional. He did not enrich himself by preaching. He did not use men. He gave himself entirely to the preaching of the gospel. He looked upon it as his own personal responsibility to carry the gospel into the whole world.

Therefore, he said to the Romans, *"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."* Rome was then, as it is now, the very seat of Satan. It was the place from which the most severe persecution arose. It was a rich, religious, cultural, superstitious city, but a city without God! And Paul was ready to go there, if God would open the door and supply the means, to go to that pagan, Godless city, not to see the ruins, but to preach the gospel.

Why would he do so? Why would he hazard his life to go to such a place to preach the gospel? He gives *three reasons*. Here are three inspirations, constraints, motives for every gospel preacher to give himself to the work of the ministry and for every

gospel church to give itself to the blessed cause of preaching the gospel of Christ to all men everywhere (vv. 16-17).

1. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”* When Paul makes this statement, the implication is that some men are ashamed of the gospel. Because the cross of Christ is an offense to the world, there are many who claim to be gospel preachers who are ashamed of it. Those who hide it and conceal it from men - Those who have ability and opportunity to preach it, but choose not to do so - Those who preach but do not preach the gospel - Those who preach the gospel in part, but refuse to preach it in its fullness - Those who acknowledge in private what they will not preach in public - Those who use ambiguous words and phrases, being careful not to offend their hearers with the truth of God - In a word, any man who seeks to please men in his preaching, who molds his message to win the approval and applause of his hearers, refusing to bear the reproach of Christ, is ashamed of the gospel. And any preacher who is ashamed of the gospel is a false prophet. God’s servants are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. They are not embarrassed to preach it, but rather glory in it. God’s servants faithfully preach electing love, effectual redemption and sovereign grace openly, publicly, and boldly in the face of opposition, without regard for their personal interests. The gospel we preach is *“the gospel of Christ.”* It is the gospel which Christ himself preached. It is the gospel we have learned of him. And it is the gospel of which he is the sum and substance. It is the gospel of his glorious person, his effectual atonement, his saving power, and his exaltation and glory.
2. *“For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”* Here is the second reason why we must preach the gospel to all men. Without it no one can be saved. The preaching of the gospel

of Christ is God's ordained means of saving his elect (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21; 1 Pet. 1:23-25). No one who knows anything about God's character doubts his ability to save his elect without the use of means. But will he do so? The answer to that question is an emphatic, resounding, "NO!" Nothing is more plainly revealed in the Word of God than the utility of the gospel in God's saving operations of grace. He will save sinners only by the preaching of the gospel." This is the means by which God the Holy Spirit quickens dead sinners, unstops deaf ears, opens blind eyes, and reconciles his enemies to himself. *"It is power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth."* If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, your faith is the result of God's power working in you by the gospel.

3. *"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."* Why must we preach the gospel? Because it is the revelation of God's righteousness, without which no one can be saved. The righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is both the rightness and rectitude of God's character and the righteousness which Christ wrought out for his elect by his obedience to God as our Mediator, the righteousness by which we have been justified. This is called the righteousness of God, because all three of the Divine Persons in the Godhead have a concern in it. We worship one God in the trinity of his sacred Persons (1 John 5:7), and rejoice to know that all three of the Divine Persons are engaged in the salvation of our souls (Eph. 1:3-14). **God the Father** sent his Son into the world to work out righteousness for us. He approves of it, accepts it on our behalf, and imputes it to us. **God the Son** is the One who performed righteousness for us, as our Representative and Substitute before God, by his obedience to the will of God in life and in death. In his life he obeyed the law for us. And in his death he satisfied the law's justice as our Substitute. **God the Holy**

Spirit reveals the righteousness of God in Christ to his people through the preaching of the gospel. He works faith in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners, enables us to lay hold of Christ, and pronounces the sentence of justification in our consciences. The Holy Spirit of God, in his work of conviction shows us our need of Christ's righteousness, shows us how that Christ accomplished righteousness, and gives us faith to trust Christ's righteousness. And he does this by the gospel being preached to us.

Child of God, aren't you thankful that God sent someone to preach the gospel to you in the power of the Spirit? Will you not do what you can to send the gospel to your fellowman? Every believer ought to make it a matter of personal responsibility to preach the gospel to the whole world. *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not"* (Gal. 6:9).

This righteousness cannot be known by the light of nature, or even by the law of God. Paul tells us that the righteousness of God in Christ is revealed in the preaching of the gospel. It is hidden from every man by nature. Even the wise and prudent of this world are ignorant of the righteousness of God, and can never discover it. It must be revealed by the Spirit of God. And it is *"revealed from faith to faith:"*

- From the faith of the Old Testament saints to the faith of the New Testament saints.
- From the faith of the gospel preacher to the faith of those who hear him.
- From one degree of faith to another.

Faith, as it grows and increases, has clearer and fuller knowledge of and joy in the righteousness of God in Christ, as it is revealed in the gospel. For the proof of this, Paul quotes from Habakkuk, *"The just shall live by faith"* (Hab. 2:4). All who are justified by the grace

of God, live by faith, trusting the righteousness of God in Christ as our only grounds of acceptance with him.

Do you see how immensely important this subject is?. Until the righteousness of God is revealed and known it is impossible for a person to be saved. The object of saving faith is Christ. And the basis of that faith is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. Faith that is based upon anything else is a false faith and a damning delusion. What we call *saving faith* is based upon the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel of Christ.

GOD IS RIGHTEOUS. As we saw in the previous study, righteousness is an attribute of God, essential to his Being. Without righteousness he would not be God. His righteousness is both underferd and immutable. This is abundantly ascribed to him throughout the Scriptures. All rational creatures, angels, and men, righteous and ultimately even the wicked declare that God is righteous (Rev. 16:5; Ex. 9:27; Jer. 12:1; Dan. 9:7; Psa. 145:7; 97:1-2). Yet, because the ungodly are ignorant of his righteousness, they cannot see the righteousness of God in his deeds. But every believer understands that God is righteous in all his deeds. Every believer says, with David, *“The Lord is righteous in all his ways”* (Psa. 145:17).

God is righteous in all his works of providence. God governs the world according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. He orders all things and disposes of all things as he will. Yet, he always does that which is right and good. He is the Judge of all the earth who must do right (Rev. 15:3). God’s ways are often puzzling to believers and trying to our faith (Psa. 73:4-13; Jer. 12:1-2). But we must never set ourselves up as judges of the Almighty. What God does is right. Our afflictions and chastisements by our heavenly Father’s hand are not for the punishment of our sins, but for our correction. Were God to punish his elect for sin, that would be unrighteous, because he punished Christ as our Surety. Righteousness cannot punish the same offense twice. God

chastens his own that we might not be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). When God sends any temporal punishment upon individuals, families, and nations, he acts righteously. He is to be and shall be praised as well for his judgments as for his mercies (Ps. 119:7, 62, 160). Still, the most severe of God's temporal judgments are tempered with mercy. When God sends famine, pestilence, and disease upon nations to destroy the wicked, while multitudes are slain chosen, redeemed infants are snatched from a cursed people into heavens glory. Moreover, by his acts of judgment God warns the living of wrath to come.

The Lord our God is righteous in all his works of grace, too. When we preach sovereign predestination and discriminating grace to men, the unbelieving always raise the objection, "That is not right!" They charge God with unrighteousness. But such charges are without foundation. Electing grace cannot be unrighteous. If it is not wrong for men to choose their own favorites, friends, and companions, how can it be wrong for God to do so? If it was not wrong for God to choose some of the angels to preserve them and pass by the rest, leaving them to their own will, how can it be wrong for him to have chosen some men to salvation in Christ and pass others by, leaving them to their own will? Predestination cannot be unrighteous. If it is not wrong for God to save his elect in time, how can it be wrong for him to determine our salvation from eternity? Effectual and particular redemption cannot be unrighteous. If all deserve God's wrath, can he be charged with evil because he redeemed some? That's foolish! Universal redemption would be unjust and unrighteous. Universal redemption declares that God punishes some for sin twice. Distinguishing grace is not unrighteous. If all men deserve God's wrath and he chooses to save many out of his own good pleasure, leaving the rest to suffer the just consequence of their crimes, how can his goodness be called *unrighteous*? Such reasoning is beyond absurd! It would never be considered the reasoning of a sane man in any other matter. It is only man's hatred of God being God that allows anyone to give consideration to such utter nonsense. God is righteous. All

that he is is righteous. And all that he does is righteous. He cannot do wrong. We may not always see the rightness of God's deeds. But faith bows to his will and trusts his righteousness and goodness.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL (Rom. 3:24-26). We rejoice to know that God forgives sin. But he will not and cannot forgive sins without the satisfaction of his justice. Though he forgives sins according to the riches of his grace, it is through the blood of Christ. I will say no more about the matter here. But this point of the gospel must be understood. There was a necessity for Christ's death. Our Lord Jesus did not have to save us. But if he would save us, there was no other way for him to do it. Justice must be satisfied. And God's justice could not be satisfied by any other means than the infinite, meritorious atonement found in the life's blood of his darling Son. The forgiveness of our sins is an act of grace. But it is equally an act of righteousness and justice (1 John 1:9; Prov. 16:6).

IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT GOD WILL GIVE TO ALL THAT WHICH IS THEIR RIGHTEOUS DUE (Acts 17:31). The Lord God gives every man exactly what he deserves, no more and no less. While he deals with some men in grace, he deals with all in justice, righteousness and truth. All who read these lines know that God's punishment of sin is a matter of strict righteousness and justice (Psa. 11:6-7). Let none be deceived. The good and righteous God must and will punish sin. He will cast the wicked into hell, because he is righteous. Your conscience tells you so (Rom. 2:14-15). The Word of God tells you so (Ex. 34:6-7; Num. 14:18; Nah. 1:3). The nature of God tells you so (Isa. 1:13-14; Heb. 1:13; 12:29). The law of God tells you so (Ezek. 18:20). The death of Christ tells you so. If God punished sin when he found it upon his Son, he will certainly punish us for sin if he finds it upon us. But I want every child of God in this world to understand that every believer will enter into and take possession of heavenly glory upon the grounds of perfect righteousness - The righteousness of Christ

imputed to us (2 Cor. 5:10-11; Col. 1:12; Eph. 5:25-27; Jude 24-25). When our Lord Jesus was made to be sin for us, God in justice gave him that which was his due for the sins made to be his by imputation. And he will reward every believer for the perfect righteousness of Christ, which is made to be ours by divine imputation. :(Jer. 50:20; 33:16). In light of these things, it is obvious that whoever he was who invented the doctrine of degrees of reward in heaven knew nothing of either the righteousness or the grace of our God.