

WHAT IS GOD LIKE? (Volume 1)

Preface

It was studying the title given to God as *'the Most High'* in Psalm 83:18 which eventually led to a more detailed examination of the character of God in the Bible which resulted in the series of *'Sound Words'* programmes under the title **'What Is God Like?'** As with all the *'Sound Words'* study booklets it will greatly increase the spiritual benefit which we pray this volume will bring you if you read it with your Bible at your side so that you can examine each of the Bible passages to which it refers. It is also essential to go through each chapter prayerfully, asking God himself to be your teacher, so that you can come to a better understanding of what he is really like in order to respond to him in the right way.

Because this subject is so large there is the need for three volumes, of which this is the first.

The series of *'Sound Words'* programmes that this booklet is based on were completed with the valuable help of Colin Vincent, who is the pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Bexleyheath, England, and I am very grateful to him for the valuable contribution he made to that series. May God bless you, as much as he blessed us as we discovered his wonderful character in the Bible.

Derek French
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Introduction

There are two important things concerning God we need to keep in our minds that are essential if we are to have an accurate understanding about him.

- i. That he exists.
- ii. What he is like.

The importance of the first of these is brought before us in Hebrews 11:6, *"...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him **MUST believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**"* This Bible passage teaches us that to know God and his blessings in our lives, we must believe that he exists. It is a matter of faith, and in *'Sound Words'* we accept this without question. We know that God exists because he has revealed himself to us in creation, in the Bible, and in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That then leads us on to the second point which is, *'What is he like?'* And this is very important, because while most people in the world believe in God, their conception of what he is like is often very unclear. As with all things in *'Sound Words'* the place we turn to in order to find the answers to our spiritual questions is the Bible, the Word of God. We do this because God has given us the Bible so that we can discover what he is like, and the difference he should make to us in our daily lives. You may recall the words of 2 Timothy 3:16,

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...”

That Bible passage teaches us that God has spoken to us in the Bible. The term ‘God-breathed’ is very graphic. In order to speak we must breathe the words out, and it is so with the words of the Bible, they have been breathed out of the mouth of God. God very graciously guided the different writers of the Bible so that though they wrote with their own individual styles, they actually wrote exactly what he wanted them to write. Peter describes it in this way in 2 Peter 1:20-21,

“...you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

There is a lovely picture in those words ‘carried along.’ It is that of a sailing ship when its sails are filled with the wind and the vessel moves forward. So it was with those who have given us the Bible – they were ‘carried along’ by the Holy Spirit of God, so that they brought to us the very words of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ gave his disciples some special promises about this help from the Holy Spirit in John’s Gospel.

(John 14:26) *“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will*

teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

(John 16:13f) *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”*

And it was this special help of the Holy Spirit that enabled these disciples, or apostles as they are also called, to give us the New Testament part of the Bible.

The reason for mentioning all this is because it is in the Bible that God reveals or makes known to us what he is like, and so it is to that book that we must now come. Our aim in this *Sound Words* Bible study booklet will be to discover something of the wonder of God himself. When reading about this in Christian books you may come across the phrase ‘the attributes of God’ and that simply refers to God’s character, and it is the character of God that we will be learning about.

What we shall discover as we consider these things is that God is very wonderful indeed. There is no one really with whom we can compare him. Yet having said that, although there will be aspects of his character that show him to be quite different from us – for example God is present everywhere but we can

only be in one place at a time – there are other characteristics with which we will be able to identify because we share a pale reflection of some of them in our own lives – for example, God is love and we are able to love as well. And this is not hard to see why, because the Bible teaches us that we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Having said that, we must never think that God is the same as we are, even in those areas where there are similarities. God is great and glorious and majestic, whereas we are small. He is our Creator, we are only his creatures. While we have knowledge, God has it to an infinite degree, and this is true of all his attributes. Remembering this will help us to consider God with reverence and awe, and compel us to honour him in our lives. It will also help us to see how we are to respond to God in the right way, and this will enrich our lives. Many, sadly, have a very limited and small view of God, which both dishonours him and also deprives them of the blessing that comes because of his greatness. This will become clearer as we proceed in our study.

Something else we must keep in mind is that Jesus taught us that God is Spirit in John 4:24. That means that God does not have a body like we have, so when the Bible speaks of God in human terms, such as the hand of God or the arm of God, it is doing so to help our understanding of him, and not that God literally has physical hands. This can be quite difficult for us at times, but we do need to remember that God is a

Spirit. For example, the Bible speaks of him seeing, yet as a Spirit he has no human eyes, or of him hearing yet he has no ears like ours. God is not a material being yet he can do all things that we can do and much more. And right at the outset this helps us to realise that God is very wonderful indeed and beyond our full comprehension. The only fitting response to him is one of awe and wonder, love and delight, worship and trust.

Chapter 1 God is independent

The first aspect or attribute of the character of God that we are going to think about, and in which he is different from us, is that God does not depend upon anything outside of himself. This is sometimes called the independence of God. The Bible teaches us that this means a number of things about God.

a. God is self-sufficient.

Because God does not depend on anything or anyone outside of himself, he is totally self-sufficient. Jesus described this in John 5:26,

“As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.”

Note those words *‘life in himself’* which are teaching us God does not depend on or need anything outside of himself for his existence. The apostle Paul spoke of God in a similar way in Acts 17:25:

“And he (i.e. God) is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.”

In other words, everything else is dependent on him, as Paul also wrote in Romans 11:36,

“For from him (i.e. God) and through him and to him are all things.”

It is this which is the primary significance of the Hebrew name for God in the Old Testament called Yahweh or Jehovah, and which is so often translated LORD in English using capital letters. This has its root in the words of Exodus 3:14 when Moses asked God what he should say to the Israelites when they asked him who sent him to be their leader. We read (Exodus 3:14),

“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. That is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.’”

God was not caused by nor is dependent on any being outside of himself, and therefore is totally different from his creatures. He is unlike us who need so much and depend on so much for our existence. For example, we need air to breath, food to eat, and liquid to drink. We depend on the help of others in so many of life’s situations. In infancy we depend on our parents to feed and clothe us. When unwell we depend on the doctors and medicines to make us well. In old age we depend on our families and children, or nursing staff to take care of us. Even in small and insignificant ways we depend on so much, such as

good weather to make a picnic enjoyable, and so on. We need so much, and most of all we depend on God to give and sustain our very existence, for without him we would not be here at all. This is brought out for us in Revelation 4:11,

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

And Paul declared (Acts 17:28),

“For in him (i.e. God) we live and move and have our being.”

And that is true even of those who claim to be atheists! They are as dependent on God for their very existence as is the godliest of his children. But that is not so with God himself. He does not need anything outside himself to sustain his existence or to bring him joy and happiness.

Consider Isaiah’s description of God in comparison to the world we live in and its peoples (Isaiah 40:15-18),

“Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?”

b. God is able to accomplish all he wants to by himself.

God's self-sufficiency also means he does not need anyone or anything to accomplish his plans and purposes (Psalm 115:3):

"God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him."

Note that it does not say 'God with the help of others', or 'He with the assistance of something else.' It simply states *"...he does whatever pleases him."* Nothing outside of himself is included or required. That he may and does choose to use others on occasions is not because he is unable to do without them, just that this is how he has chosen to work. For example, God could, if he so chose, reach the lost without ever using another single human being in the process, but he has chosen to use his people. He gives Christian believers the privilege of being labourers together with him (1 Corinthians 3:9), but not out of any lack or need in himself, just out of his sheer grace to give us this privilege.

God is absolutely sovereign and independent in all his counsel, mind and will. (Psalm 33:11)

"...the plans of the Lord stand firm for ever, the purposes of his heart through all generations."

(Isaiah 46:10) *"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: 'My purpose will stand and I will do all that I please.'"*

Daniel expressed this when he worshipped God as the Most High who lives forever and ever (Daniel 4:35):

"All peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No-one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'"

We need to remember that even when we bring gifts to God, we are only giving what he first gave us, as he declared to Job in Job 41:11:

"Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me."

c. God existed before anything else.

God's independence means that God existed before anything else was created, and so did not need anything else outside himself to exist. Moses stated it like this in Psalm 90:2:

"Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."

In other words, when there was nothing else but God, he existed without the need of anything in all creation. If all else passed away this very minute, God would still exist, because he is not dependent on them (Psalm 102:25-27):

"In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you

will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”

d. An error to avoid.

Some have thought that God created man because he was in some way lonely or unhappy and needed man. But this is so very wrong, as the Bible makes clear. God is a Trinity of persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And there has always been perfect communion and joy and glory shared by each person in the Godhead – so that nothing needed to be added nor could be added to make God happier. When the Lord Jesus Christ prayed to his Father in John 17, his high priestly prayer just before his crucifixion, he spoke both of the glory and the love that existed between the persons of the Godhead even before the beginning of time. (See John 17:5 & 24.)

e. God still takes great joy in the works of his hands.

Having said all that, we must also add the amazing and wonderful truth that we, and the rest of creation, can glorify, honour and gladden the heart of God. This is why God created all things in the first place, to bring glory to his holy name (Revelation 4:11). And this is the peculiar privilege of God’s own dear children. Consider the words in these Bible passages:-

(Isaiah 62:3-5) “... for the Lord will take delight in you ... as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”

*(Zephaniah 3:17) “The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. **He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.**”*

*(Ephesians 1:11-12) “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that **we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.**”*

While God does not need to receive love and joy and honour from us, yet he has condescended to do so. And it is this supremely which gives meaning to our existence. The Lord of glory, the great I AM, the all-sufficient God, has stooped to ask the love of our poor hearts! What amazing grace this is! And what an amazing privilege that God has granted to us. We are significant to God! However small or insignificant or unknown we may be to the rest of the world, we are significant to God. What an amazing, gracious, kind, loving, wonderful God the Lord is. Who would not want to love and adore him forever and ever? The world may despise us, ill treat us, ignore us, abuse us, but the great God of heaven loves us and delights over us. It is a staggering truth, and yet this is what God has declared in his Word the Bible. What an amazing God the Lord is!

f. The response we should make to such a God.

These two responses should come from us towards him.

- i. We should love God with all our hearts because he has given us life, and in Christ given us eternal life, and ever praise and serve him who has so loved us.
- ii. We should trust him with all our hearts in all our needs.

There is no room for proud self-sufficiency in us, and so we should demonstrate that we really do depend on him without whom we would not even exist. It was this which caused the psalmist Asaph to declare when he was battling with the problem of envying the prosperity of the wicked, that to know God himself was more precious than anything else (Psalm 73:25-26):

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.”

God was everything to him, and he trusted in God completely as the only One who was the answer to all his needs and desires. Although he knew that all around him might come to nought, his God would remain, and would sustain and keep him forever. To know God was more precious and important to Asaph than anything else, and that is still true for us today. Being in the hands of the all-sufficient God is the most desirable and secure place to be.

Chapter 2 God is unchangeable

1) The truth stated.

As we begin looking at this topic we must say that this is another area of God’s character in which he is totally different from us. So we shall use this as a background to point out the contrast that exists between us and God. First we shall consider a few examples of how we change. We change physically every day, and this becomes more obvious as the years go by. Our features change, our weight changes, even the colour of our hair changes. We also increase in knowledge as we learn things, and also seem to lose knowledge as we forget things. Our strength changes, from the weakness of infancy to the vigour of adulthood to the frailty of old age. We change our plans, our ambitions, our likes and dislikes. We can change for the better, and sadly sometimes for worse. There is so much about us that is changing constantly, but that is not so with God.

Again and again the Bible brings this truth before us. There is the plain statement at the end of the Old Testament in Malachi 3:6, **“I the Lord do not change.”** And there is a similar declaration by James in the New Testament (James 1:17):

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

So we can say about God that he does not grow older. He does not increase or decrease, develop or decay in any way. He cannot improve nor deteriorate. His power never becomes greater or less. He is the same

in essence and all his virtues, his mind and will, and his love and life – they are eternally unchangeable. He cannot become wiser or holier or more righteous or gracious than he has always been. As God is perfect he can never get better or grow worse. The contrast between us and God here is most remarkable.

2) God's unchangeableness illustrated.

The truth that God is an unchanging God recurs throughout the Bible in various ways.

i. God does not change his mind.

There is the declaration about God by Balaam (Numbers 23:19):

*“God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man, **that he should change his mind.**”*

When Samuel told King Saul the solemn message that God had rejected him he said to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:29:

*“He who is the Glory of Israel (i.e. God) does not lie **or change his mind**; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.”*

ii. God does not change his plans.

One of Job's comforters named Elihu spoke about God in this way (Job 36:5),

*“God is mighty, but does not despise men; he is mighty, **and firm in his purpose.**”*

The Psalmist declared that God's plans are steadfast. In contrast to the schemes of men, no one can change them because he is unchangeable (Psalm 33:10-11):

*“The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. **But the plans of the Lord stand firm for ever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.**”*

And this is contrasted with man's very changeable plans, which can so often and so easily be frustrated as these two Bible passages demonstrate. (Proverbs 19:21):

“Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.”

(Isaiah 14:24) *“The Lord Almighty has sworn, ‘Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.’”*

(See also Isaiah 46:9-10.)

iii. God does not change his promises or threats.

God is unchanging with regard to the promises he makes, so that he never goes back on his word. He is totally reliable.

(Psalm 89:34) *“I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered.”*

(Psalm 110:4) *“**The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind**: you are a priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek.”*

(NB. This verse is quoted in Hebrews 7:21.)

And this is equally true to his promises of destruction as those of his blessing. Here are two great statements about his blessing.

(Titus 1:1-3) *“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, **which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour.**”*

(Hebrews 6:17-18) *“Because God wanted to make **the unchanging nature of his purpose** very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, **by two unchangeable things (i.e. the promise itself and the oath he made about it) in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.**”*

And here is a statement about his judgement (Jeremiah 4:27-28):

*“This is what the Lord says: ‘The whole land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely. Therefore the earth will mourn and the heavens grow dark, because **I have spoken and will not relent, I have decided and will not turn back.**’”*

iv. God does not age or diminish.

In contrast to the heavens and earth which will wear out, God will not (Psalm 102:25-27):

*“In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, **but you remain**; they will wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. **But you remain the same, and your years will never end.**”*

God always has been and always will be.

3) Some problems answered.

This truth about God’s unchangeableness has raised two problems in people’s minds that have come from their reading of the Bible itself.

Problem 1:

What is meant in the Bible when it says that God repents or relents? When we repent that involves a change in us. Is that the same for God?

Answer 1:

There are a number of instances that we can use to illustrate this problem. Take, for example, Jonah’s pronouncement that in 40 days the city of Nineveh would be destroyed (Jonah 3:4ff), when in fact it was not!

(Jonah 3:10) *“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.”*

This is put even more strongly in the Authorised Version of the Bible where it is translated,

“God repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them, and did it not.”

There are other similar cases in the Bible such as Hezekiah’s illness from which he was told he would die, but in answer to his prayers he actually lived another 15 years (see Isaiah 38). And so the problem is, how do we fit these in to those other statements of the Bible which tell us God is unchangeable?

The way to answer this problem is to say that these passages do not mean that God has changed in his purposes, which are unchangeable, as we have already seen, but that the working out of them **as far as we are concerned** appears that way.

Take first example from the book of Jonah we have just mentioned. God’s unchanging holiness requires him to treat the wicked differently from the righteous. Therefore, if the righteous become wicked God will treat them accordingly, and also if the wicked forsake their sin he will treat them accordingly. God has always required repentance as a condition of receiving his forgiveness, and that when the Ninevites repented of their sins, God acted exactly according to his unchanging character and forgave them. In the same way God has declared that he will punish the unrepentant sinner, and he will always act consistently because he does not change. When we examine such Bible statements that imply a change in God in their context, we shall discover the change has inevitably been in man, and his relationships with God. It is when men change that God acts accordingly, and

therefore different situations mean he will do different things. We can illustrate it like this. When someone is bicycling against the wind it is very hard, but when he turns around and travels in the other direction it is as if there has been a change in the wind from being against him to being for him, whereas in fact the change has been in the cyclist. So it is with God who is against rebellious sinners, but for those who repent. It is they who change, not God. When someone becomes a Christian believer the wind of God’s Spirit (John 3:8) no longer resists them but assists them.

The second example was Hezekiah. In his case there was a distinct change in the situation which came as a direct result of God’s warning. Hezekiah prayed to God for mercy. Prior to that time there was no prayer, and God’s warning that he would die produced this change in Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:2-3):

“Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord. ‘Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly.”

And one unchanging truth about God is that he hears and responds to the prayers of his people. David described God in Psalm 65:2 as, *“O you who hear prayer...”*

We must say ultimately that because God’s plans and purposes are unchanging and have been in his mind for all eternity, that of necessity they must have included all the various means whereby he would

bring his purposes to fulfilment. There is a sense in which we can say that God always intended to forgive the people of Nineveh, but in his plan this was brought about by Jonah's message of judgement which, in fact, changed the Ninevites not God. Also that God always intended to extend Hezekiah's life for 15 years, and the means whereby he had chosen to accomplish this was by the warning he gave him and the prayer he made. These things are to a real extent beyond our full comprehension, but that should not disturb us because, after all, God is much greater than we shall ever be able to comprehend.

Problem 2:

If God is an unchanging God, does that mean he cannot move or act? Does unchangeableness mean God must be static, as the descriptions of him in the Bible as our Rock imply? (See Deuteronomy 32:4, etc.)

Answer 2:

God's unchangeableness does not mean that he cannot move or act, because that is to confuse unchangeableness with immobility. We can illustrate it with ourselves. We are still the same people we were when we woke this morning, even though since then we may have been involved in a number of activities. We have moved and acted, but not ceased to be ourselves. And God is the living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9), not some lifeless idol. Therefore, though he does not change in his being or perfections, he is constantly acting and working. He is, after all, a

personal God who is alive, and not some dead and useless idol of man's making

4) The preciousness of God's unchangeableness.

i. It is a source of great comfort for the believer.

It is most reassuring that in a changing world, and in our own changing circumstances, we have a God who does not alter. He is the one stable being in all creation, so that he is like an anchor for us in the storms of life. We may lose all else but we cannot lose him. He does not change in his tender dealings with his children. We are loved with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3; Psalm 100:5). Though at times our love for God waxes hot and cold, his for us remains the same. He is indeed a shelter for us in life's tempests. Further, the salvation God has given us is unchanging. Once he has justified us by faith in Christ, we are forever justified. So there is great comfort and assurance for the believer from the unchanging nature of God's character. Consider these two Bible passages: (Romans 11:29)

"...God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."

(Isaiah 54:10) *"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you."*

And what a great incentive this is for us to engage in prayer, asking God that his will should be done in our lives (1 John 5:14). If God could change, then really we could never trust him, for he who one day

promises to be for those who trust him, may the next day change his mind and be against them. This would be terrible, but thankfully God has told us that will never happen because he does not change (Malachi 3:6):

“I the Lord do not change. So you. O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.”

Consider how dreadful it would be if God did change. We would have to live in constant fear that one day he may destroy us instead of save us. It would also mean that we could never ever rely on any of his promises to us in the Bible, because he might abandon them one day, including the promise to forgive us for Christ’s sake. It would mean God’s purposes set out for us in the Bible may be changed and that, after all, there may never be new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness, and we may never see Christ face to face, be like him and dwell with him for ever. If God could change then all we could ever do is despair. But thankfully God cannot change and therefore will not change. Therefore, he is one who is worthy of our absolute trust and confidence, for he will never fail us. He can be relied on one hundred percent.

ii. It is a solemn warning and encouragement to sinners to seek God.

Similarly, God’s unchanging nature stands as an encouragement and a warning to those who have not followed God as they should have. The warning is that God in his unchanging holiness must punish sinners who continue to rebel against him. (See

Ezekiel 8:18 & 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.) This is very solemn and something that must be considered seriously.

Alongside this solemn truth is an encouraging one. God is also unchanging in his mercy, and will forgive every sinner who repents and turns to him for pardon through the Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 55:7):

“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”

These are two sides of God’s unchangeableness that should make every unbeliever turn to the Lord Jesus Christ immediately. And those who do come under his unchanging care. (Hebrews 13:8)

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

God is infinite - part 1

Another way whereby God is different from us is that the Bible teaches he is infinite. This means he has no limitations like us. He is not limited by the size of the universe, by space or by time, and cannot be confined. And this is seen in a number of ways.

1) God is absolutely perfect.

a. Everything about God is perfection.

God does not need to develop and increase like we do, because he is infinite in all his virtues. For example, his knowledge and wisdom and love and grace and power and holiness and everything else about God is

perfect. In God there is no defect. This means he does not need anything to be added to him to make him complete. Also he cannot lose any of his character so that he becomes less than he was.

We see this is exhibited in the way he described himself to Moses. God had commanded Moses to lead the people of Israel, and Moses was reluctant, and so asked God whom he should say had sent him to lead them. God's answer was quite remarkable (Exodus 3:14):

"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. That is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.'"

That name 'I AM' teaches us among other things that God is perfect. God did not say, "I was, but now I'm different." Neither did he say, "I will become", as if in the future he will change. He simply said that he is permanently perfect; he is 'I AM'.

We see again that God is far greater than anything he has made, or anything that exists (Psalm 145:3):

"Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no-one can fathom."

This statement by King David tells us everything about God is great, and that his greatness is beyond measure. We cannot quantify it. One of Job's comforters was named Zophar, and he described God in a similar way (Job 11:7-9):

"Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher

than the heavens – what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave – what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea."

b. The relevance of this for us.

Since God is perfect, then there is no one better to whom we can entrust our lives. And what is so wonderful is that he wants us to trust him. This is great condescension on God's part. It is an indication of his great grace, as the hymn writer puts it, that God should *"stoop to ask the love of my poor heart."*

Since God is perfect he is well able to meet all our needs, so bringing our needs to God in prayer takes on a new meaning. It is not a useless activity because God is well able to help us. It is not a foolish thing because God is wise and will do what is best for us.

Since God is perfect, how we should adore and admire him, and seek in some small way to grow like him. Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 5:48, *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Since God is perfect, one of the great joys of heaven will be that we shall be continually discovering the perfection and greatness of God, and we shall never ever exhaust him so that we shall be able to say, "There is no more about God for me to discover!" Heaven will be eternal delight as we discover more and more about God. Therefore, what a prospect to look forward to and prepare for now.

2) God is eternal.

a. God is not limited by time.

The Bible teaches us that because God is infinite then he is not limited by time. We are. We all had a beginning, we live moment by moment, we grow old, and soon our time on earth will be over. We are not the same as we were yesterday, and we shall be different tomorrow. But with God it is not like that. He is outside of time, and exalted above time. After all he created time. So while time changes us, it does not change God.

The fact that God is eternal therefore means he had no beginning and shall have no end. Consider how this is put in Revelation 1:4,

"Grace and peace to you from him who was, and who is, and who is to come..."

(See also Rev 1:8; 4:8.) We have already seen from Exodus 3:14 that God described himself as the eternal 'I AM', and this was something Jesus claimed for himself (John 8:58):

"I tell you the truth," Jesus said, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

The Jews who heard him say these words knew instantly that he was declaring he was God. The Psalmist also describes this aspect of God's character on a number of occasions. (Psalm 102:12)

"But you, O Lord, sit enthroned for ever; your renown endures through all generations."

(Psalm 90:1-2) *"Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the*

mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."

We inevitably think of that word 'everlasting' in terms of time. To us it is endless time, but it is not so for God. For us, we think of things in terms of the past, the present and the future, but for God it is not so. For God everything is present before him – he sees the past, present and future all at once (Isaiah 46:10):

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come."

(See also Isaiah 41:4; 45:21.) All illustrations that we may use to try to describe the glorious being of God will inevitably fall short, but this might help you to understand something of the truth in Isaiah's words. Imagine you are standing on a street corner and you are watching a long procession of different vehicles. As time goes by you watch 100 of these pass in front of your eyes one by one. You could not see all the procession at once, only that part of it which passed in front of you at any one time. However, if you had been able to fly in a helicopter so that you were 100 metres above where you were standing, then you could see things from a different perspective, and you could see the beginning, the centre and the end of that procession of cars all at once. That is a very inadequate illustration of the fact that God sees all things present before him, the end from the beginning.

So things that happened a thousand years ago are as if they had happened today in God's mind.

Because of this God never forgets anything, neither does he need to learn anything new. Everything in time is equally clear to him always. Also because God is eternal he does not grow old, and is not effected by time (Psalm 102:25-27):

*“In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. **But you remain the same, and your years will never end.**”*

Time does not limit God at all, but it limits us a great deal. We often say, “If only I had more time.” But God never has to say that. Peter explains it like this in 2 Peter 3:8:

“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day.”

(See also Psalm 90:4.) And because of this God is never too early or too late in anything he does, because time does not restrict him. And this in turn emphasises God's uniqueness, because though he is not limited by time in any way at all, and sees all events before him now, he also acts in time! The most wonderful thing that God has done is described like this by Paul (Galatians 4:4-5),

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem

those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”

b. The relevance of this for us.

We must admit that what we have discovered from the Bible passages we have considered is something beyond our comprehension. That should not disturb us because we are mere creatures, but God is the Creator. Rather it declares to us again that God is altogether wonderful, which in turn compels us to wonder and worship at his footstool. He is indeed the only adorable God who lives forever and ever.

In turn this presents us with the reality of two other important Biblical truths.

i. The reality that all who believe in the Son of God are given eternal life by God.

(John 3:16) *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.”* For the Christian believer, the follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is an unending and glorious future, where we shall dwell in the presence of God forever. It will be unending glory, and joy and bliss in the presence of the Lord. Then we shall praise him and serve him forever without any of the restrictions that hinder us so much now. We shall for all the ages of eternity dwell with Christ in the new heavens and the new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:14; Revelation 21 and 25). God's eternity is a source of great comfort and assurance for the people of God today.

- ii. The solemn reality that those who refuse to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will suffer eternal punishment.

Paul assured the persecuted Thessalonian Christians that a day was coming when their trials would be over (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10): *“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and the from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among those who have believed.”* This solemn aspect of God’s eternity stands as a warning to sinful men and women. Therefore, there is the urgent need for them to turn to God in repentance and to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, while they still have time (Acts 20:21). Remember the rich man who had ignored God in his life and who died and went to hell, suffered great torment, we are told by Jesus in Luke 16:23. He longed for some relief and asked Abraham for it, but Abraham told him that his position in hell was fixed for-ever (Luke 16:25-26): *“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm*

has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’” The only way to escape such a dreadful and eternal end is to seek the mercy and forgiveness of God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you have never done so you need to do that now. Remember Paul’s great challenge (2 Corinthians 6:2): *“I tell you, now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.”* Therefore do not put it off until it is too late.

God is infinite - part 2

God is everywhere

We have already seen in the previous chapter that God is free from limitations in two areas.

- i. He is perfect in all his being.
- ii. He is eternal in relation to time.

A third area where God is infinite is in his relation to space. Scholars have a special phrase for this: *‘the omnipresence of God.’* This simply means that the Bible teaches us God is everywhere. We are so different because we are limited to being in one place at one time. I am sure there have been times when you wished you could be in two places at the same time. For example, you may have been at work but wished you could also be with your friend who was about to undergo an operation in a hospital many miles away from you. The distance prevented you from being with that friend. For God, however, that would not have been a problem at all. The wonderful

thing about God is that it is not only possible for him to be in two places at once, but he is in fact in all places at once. And the Bible teaches us that God in his entirety is everywhere. It is not that part of God is in one country, and another part of him is somewhere else. Rather God is everywhere. Now this is something very difficult for our minds to comprehend, and we need to remember the reason for this is that we are finite, whereas God is infinite. We are limited to only being in one place at a time, but God is unlimited in this respect and is in fact everywhere. With that in mind, we are now going to explore what the Bible teaches us about this facet of God's character.

1) The Truth revealed in the Bible.

The truth that God is present everywhere is brought before us in the Bible in a number of ways, and the following are a selection.

a. The testimony of King Solomon.

When Solomon finished building the temple of God in Jerusalem he prayed about this building he had made for God (1 Kings 8:27):

“But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!”

Solomon had grasped the immensity of God, and realised that he cannot be restricted in any way to one single place. While God is everywhere, we must also add that he cannot be contained in space because he is beyond that, and Solomon had grasped this. While God is very near to us he is also exalted far above us.

The scholars have two words to describe this; God is both immanent and transcendent.

b. The instruction of the apostle Paul.

When Paul was visiting the ungodly city of Athens, he was saddened to see how its people were given over to idolatry. In part of the city a group of intellectual philosophers used to meet and spent all their time discussing various ideas, some new, some old. Paul had opportunity to address them, and so he taught them about the only true and living God (Acts 17:24ff):

“The God who made the world and everything in it is Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made with hands...and yet he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.”

In other words, Paul was telling them that God was not like a dead idol, but was alive and could not be confined to a temple or similar structure. His reason was that God is present everywhere.

c. The Lord's encouragement to Isaiah.

To help us understand that he is everywhere, God has revealed this statement in Isaiah 66:1-2:

“This is what the Lord says: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where shall my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?’ declares the Lord.”

d. The rebuke of false prophets through Jeremiah.

In the days of Jeremiah there were sadly many false prophets who led the people away from God. They had fallen into the delusion that somehow their words were hidden from God, and that he was unaware of what they were doing. That was a false presumption that often deludes those who reject God and his commands. However, through Jeremiah, God exposed both their wicked ways and their false sense of security by reminding them he is everywhere (Jeremiah 23:23-24):

“‘Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the Lord, ‘and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ declares the Lord. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ declares the Lord.”

They were told quite clearly that they could not hide from his presence at all, and therefore he was fully aware of their wickedness.

e. The experience of Jonah.

It was this truth that the prophet Jonah learned in a very dramatic way. God had commanded him to go to the city of Nineveh and to preach against because of its wickedness (Jonah 1). But Jonah was unwilling, and tried to run away by catching a boat to Tarshish, one of the farthest known points of the world in his day away from Nineveh. He thought he could run away from God, but he was very mistaken. The Lord caused a great storm to arise, and Jonah was thrown overboard. God had prepared a great fish to swallow

him (Jonah 1:17). Through all this Jonah learned that he could not run away from God, because he is everywhere. And amazingly, in his grace, God listened to and answered Jonah’s prayer, even while he was in the depths of the sea! In a lovely way God was still with Jonah when he least deserved it! (Read Jonah 2.)

f. The statement of David.

The lovely 139th Psalm was written by David, the shepherd who became a great king in Israel. The Psalm teaches us many things about God, and even as David wrote he declared in verse 6,

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.”

He was aware that he did not fully understand the very words he was writing because God is so great. He was writing about truth that was beyond his full comprehension, and he just stood in awe and wonder as he contemplated the greatness of God. That should also be our attitude as we approach this extraordinary truth about God’s presence. So with that sense of awe and reverence let us look at what David wrote about God’s presence.

David presents this truth in a very down-to-earth way. He begins by asking two pertinent questions (Psalm 139:7):

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?”

He was asking if it was possible for us to escape to somewhere where God could not be found. Is there any place in the whole of creation that would be outside of God's presence? His answer in the next three verses is quite staggering (Psalm 139:8-10):

“If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

David had grasped the sheer wonder of the fact that God is everywhere. He uses the extremes of space and distance to drive the point home – height or depth, east or west can never separate us from Almighty God. To try to escape from him is useless and folly. To run away from him is impossible.

g. The great promises of God.

Just as Joshua was to take over the leadership of the people of Israel, the Lord gave him a wonderful promise through Moses. Joshua was going to have to face many enemies and be involved in many military battles as leader of Israel. To encourage him, God gave him these words (Deuteronomy 31:6):

*“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, **for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.**”*

Now this could never have been fulfilled if God was not in every place, but because he is, then Joshua would never be alone. In the New Testament book of

Hebrews the writer takes up this same promise and tells us it is just as true for every Christian believer as it was for Joshua (see Hebrews 13:5).

Further, just before Jesus ascended into heaven, after he had died on the cross and risen from the dead, he gave his disciples a special commission. There was work for them to do, and it was an enormous task (Matthew 28:18-20):

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.’”

Now to say the least, this was a huge undertaking, and this group of disciples were few in number and very weak. They were described later in Acts 4:13 as *“...unschooled, ordinary men...”* But for their encouragement the Lord Jesus gave these men this wonderful promise (Matthew 28:20): *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* The Saviour they had come to love and trust in assured them he would be with them all the time, and this was because he would be everywhere they went.

2) Lessons to apply.

As we read through the Bible we can see how God was present everywhere for a number of different purposes. These purposes are very important as they affect us so much.

a. God is present to help his people.

The most frequent use of God's presence in the Bible is that he may help and bless his own children. And this is a tremendous encouragement for Christian believers today. Go back to the words of David in Psalm 139, and note the words of verse 10:

*“If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, **even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.**”*

Because David was a believer, he knew that wherever he went, and whatever he faced, whether it was danger or difficulty or delight, God would always be with him. When David was uncertain about what was happening to him and about what he should do, he knew God would direct his footsteps, because the Lord was with him. When he feared lest he should fall away from God, or that Satan would try to tear him away from God, he knew God would never let him go, but hold on to him fast. He knew that God was in control of everything that would ever happen to him, and be with him in it all. And that is a wonderful antidote to fear and panic. I think most of us get times when we feel afraid, and that is also likely to happen to us in the future. But if we could only grasp the significance of the fact that God is with us, to uphold and keep and guide and direct us, it would fill us with tremendous calm and peace, when otherwise we would be in fear and trepidation.

This was brought home to me and my wife recently while visiting a dear friend who was dying with cancer. She was in considerable pain, and was fully aware that her illness was incurable. She knew, therefore, her time on earth was short, and the thought of leaving her husband and children distressed her very much. BUT she was not at all anxious about her own future nor that of her family she would leave behind. She knew God was with her, and with them, and that he would walk with her through the valley of the shadow of death. She knew she would never be alone, and neither would her loved ones, because our great God, our loving heavenly Father would be present with her and with them forever. Indeed, the presence of God brought such peace to her, that she was looking forward to being with the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, which happened only a few days later.

b. God is present to hear and answer his children's prayers.

We have already referred to this with our reference to Jonah, and it is a very important and precious truth for us to benefit from. Imagine for a moment if God was limited so that he could only be in one place at one time. If he was with someone else, we could never be sure he was with us. And that would mean we could never know with any certainty if he heard us when we prayed to him. Indeed, if God was limited like that he could never hear many of his people's prayers at all, and that would be dreadful. It would make prayer like

a lottery. But God is not limited in that way, and that means he is able to hear all the prayers of all his people where ever and when ever they pray. And what reassurance this gives to us. No difficulty, no trial, no adversity will ever cut us off from God and prevent him hearing our prayers. Nothing shall ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (see Romans.8:38-39). And because God is so close to us he can hear a whisper and even a prayer uttered in the silence of our own hearts.

This has been a frequent encouragement to persecuted believers when in prison and solitary confinement for their faith. Their persecutors have not been able to separate them from God. Consider Paul and Silas when they were in the prison at Philippi for simply preaching the gospel (Acts 16). The Lord was with them and they spoke to him (Acts 16:25):

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God...”

Others have testified to this blessing when facing surgery alone, or when they have lost their husband or wife, the Lord has been with them and they have been able to talk with him, and he answered their prayers.

A very important issue concerning this truth that God is present everywhere is that it helps us not to fall into thinking that God can only be reached if we are in certain places. While it is very helpful to meet with other Christian believers to worship God, we must remember there is nothing special about the building we meet in. If God could only be reached in certain

temples or churches or cathedrals, then this would exclude a tremendous number of believers. Let me explain why it is important to make this point. Many believers live in countries where they are not allowed to erect church buildings for Christian meetings. They have to meet secretly in homes or in the open air in forests. But this does not prevent them from coming to God because he is everywhere. You see, God cannot be contained, so we must not fall into the trap of thinking he is restricted to certain buildings. And that is a tremendous encouragement, because we can come to God through the Lord Jesus Christ wherever we may be and whatever situation we may be facing.

c. God is present to punish.

This is a most solemn side of this great truth about God. He sees every wrong action, hears every wrong word, and knows every wrong thought. He is present when we obey him, and is present when we disobey him. No one in the whole universe lives outside of his all-pervading presence. And therefore God sometimes is present to judge those guilty of wrong. Over the centuries many have learned this to their own cost. They have lived as if God did not exist and then suffered the consequences of their sinful behaviour. Here are some examples from the Bible itself. Consider the people of Noah's day who lived so wickedly that God destroyed them all through the flood (see Genesis 6-9). Then we have the example of Pharaoh during the time of Moses. He was destroyed

by God in the Red Sea (see Exodus 14). God was present with him to punish him for refusing to let God's people go. Then in the New Testament we have to sad case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. They thought they could lie and get away with it. They forfeited their lives! And all this points towards the judgement that God will bring on unbelievers when the Lord Jesus Christ returns (2 Thessalonians 1:9):

“They will be destroyed with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power...”

This does not mean they go to a place where God is not found, but that they are shut out of the presence of God's help and blessing, and will be deprived of any of his comfort, and become recipients of his wrath. This is also why sometimes believers feel as if God is far away from them, especially when they have been guilty of sin, or backsliding. It is not that God suddenly ceases to be there, but rather that he withdraws the sense of his presence from them. This is in order to make them repent and seek him afresh. Indeed the thought of the possibility that God might depart from him when he had sinned caused David to write in Psalm 51:11:

“Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.”

d. God is present to uphold all things.

It is the presence of God everywhere that enables the universe to exist and be maintained. If God were not

present it would all fall apart (Acts 17:28): *“For in him (i.e. God) we live and move and have our being.”* And this is especially true of God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:17):

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

(Hebrews 1:3) *“The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”*

These verses help us to avoid making another mistake about God. Although God is present everywhere in his creation, he is distinct from it. Some have wrongly taught that God is the universe, that each tree and flower and animal and star are all part of God. But that is not true. That false teaching has a special name, and it is called pantheism. But the Bible tells us God is different from his creation, even though he is present everywhere in it. It has been illustrated by thinking of a sponge that is full of water. Although the water is present everywhere throughout the sponge, it is distinct from it. So it is with God. He is present everywhere in his creation, yet is distinct from it.

Conclusion

The great question is, will God be with you to help and bless and answer your prayers, or will he be with you to punish you? The only way to be certain that he will not punish you is to seek the mercy and forgiveness that is found in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Then you can rest assured that God will never

ever leave you alone but be with you every second of your life until he brings you safely to heaven.

Chapter 5 God is one

We have already seen that God is truly wonderful. He is so glorious that he is beyond our full comprehension, even though it is possible for us to know him and know about him. There is so much to his being that learning about him is like exploring on a never-ending journey. We will never completely plumb the depths of his being, there is so much to discover about him. But while all that is true, the Bible also teaches us that there is what we can call a marvellous ‘simplicity’ or ‘unity’ about God. Now, we need to be careful at this point, because the Bible does not say that God is simple – far from it! But it does teach us that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4):

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

The Old Testament believers called this the ‘*shema*’ from the Hebrew word ‘hear’ at the beginning of the verse. It was recited each day by godly believers, and the response that this calls from us is described in the next verse (Deuteronomy 6:5):

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

We must now consider what the Bible means when it says God is ‘one’.

1) God is not made up of parts.

The first thing we must realise is that God cannot be divided up into sections. And here again we see an immediate difference between God and us. You could cut your hand off, but you would still remain you. That cannot be so with God. If we cut off one of God’s attributes he would cease to be God! If we could remove love from God’s character, he would cease to be God. God is all of his attributes: he is one. God is not like some modern materials or objects which are made up of different components. We can think, for example, of a single motorcar. This has many components, but each one is a separate item on its own. The windscreen is not a tyre, nor the door a seat. But when the Bible teaches us that God is one it means that all of God is holy, all of God is love, all of God merciful, all of God is wise, all of God is everywhere, and so on. He is one inseparable whole. We cannot add to nor subtract from him, because God is perfect in all his being. He is absolute goodness, perfection. This is why the Bible teaches us that ‘*God is light*’ and ‘*God is love*’ and ‘*God is life*’ and ‘*God is truth*’ and so on. If you like, we can say that all God’s different attributes describe every facet of his being. The Bible significantly never singles out one of his attributes above the others as if they were not so important. It is not that part of God is light and another part of him is love, but all of God is light and all of God is love. God is always just and God is always love. They are never in conflict with each other. His love is holy and righteous; his mercy is

good and wise. We must also say his righteousness is merciful, and his wisdom is holy, and so on.

We see this wonderfully illustrated when we consider God's actions, for they display his attributes so clearly. We can illustrate it by looking at the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ – the most tremendous thing that God has ever done. As we think about the death of Jesus and we ask the question, 'Which of God's attributes is emphasised most in the crucifixion?', a careful consideration will reveal more than one answer. We might say at first sight that Calvary displays God's love supremely, and of course that is right. How loving God must be to give his Son to be our Saviour – he must love us an enormous amount. But then we could equally say that God's justice shines supremely, because at the cross God justly punished the sins of his people. Then we could add God's wisdom, because who would have thought of such a way of salvation for sinners – it is far above human wisdom. And then we could say God's power shines supremely at Calvary, for there God overcame sin, Satan and death. And so we could go on, until we could say every aspect of God's character is revealed at Calvary in one way or another. And that is understandable, because God is one. All of God acts all of the time. While it may be that we see one aspect of his character more clearly in some actions than in others, we cannot separate any of them from the rest.

Again we are confronted with a truth about God that we cannot fully understand, because God is infinite and we are finite. It is something that fills us again with awe and wonder at his being. He is entirely different from any thing or anyone else. He is wonderful!

2) God is the only God.

The Bible never teaches us that there are many gods, and that the Lord is just one among them. He alone is God, and beside him there is no other (see Deuteronomy 4:39; Isaiah 46:9). Indeed, it was Solomon's desire that all people on earth should realise this when he prayed to God at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:59-60):

“May these words of mine, which I have prayed before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day's need, so that all peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other.”

Paul also declared (1 Corinthians. 8:6):

“...for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.”

This teaches us a number of important things about God.

- i. It means that there is only one supreme being, only one God. And that everything and everyone else is derived from him. This is brought out for us in Exodus 15:11, *“Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”* God is unique.
- ii It also means that idolatry in all its forms is both wrong, sinful, and useless, for all such idols are not true gods at all! In other words, there is simply no other true God in existence, visible or invisible in any part of the universe. The only God in existence is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who became man in the person of Jesus. If our god is not this God, then our god simply does not exist, whatever we may think or imagine, or what others may tell us. And this is a very important truth to grasp. Millions in our world worship worthless idols, that cannot help them one single bit. They do this sincerely, even sacrificially, but it is of no lasting spiritual benefit to them at all. Indeed, the very opposite is true, for such worship keeps them from the one true God, the Lord of heaven and earth revealed to us in the Bible. It keeps them from trusting and following the Lord Jesus Christ who alone can bring us to God. It deprives them of the help and consolation of the Holy Spirit of God, who lives in the hearts of all his true worshippers.

Therefore, because the Lord our God is one, we must not divide our adoration, love and service between him and some other. It is all to be given to him alone (Isaiah 45:5): *“I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.”* (See also Exodus 15:11; Galatians 3:20; Ephesians 4:6.)

We read in Exodus 20:2-3:

*“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. **You shall have no other gods before me.**”*

This is the first of the Ten Commandments, and it means that we are not to recognise the existence of any other god, because there is no other god. And since there is only one God, then he alone is the One we are to please. And we please God when our devotion, trust, submission, obedience, and service is given to him alone. It is seen when in our praying we turn to him alone, instead of turning to men, or angels, or anyone or anything else. We honour God when in our adoration he is loved above all others. It is evident when in our gratitude we are to praise him, for he alone is the giver of every good and perfect gift.

We can sum up what we have been saying in this simple statement: this one undivided God desires the undivided love, trust, and devotion of our hearts. Then let us seek to give it to him.

Chapter 6 God is personal

That God is a real person is taught everywhere throughout the Bible, and has been enjoyed by the true people of God all over the world. Indeed, even

when Christian believers have gone into space, as some of the astronauts have, even there they have been able to enjoy this wonderful truth about God – that he is a person. God is someone who is alive, and not lifeless. He is someone we can have a relationship with, and who delights to have a relationship with us.

This is very important because many think of God as some impersonal power, albeit great. But you cannot have a relationship with something impersonal. For example, the wind has tremendous power, so do the tides of the sea, and so do rivers. Indeed, that power has been utilised to produce electricity, but it is impossible to have a relationship with either the wind or the sea or a river. You can like these things and even fear them, but you cannot have a conversation with them nor they with you, because they are impersonal. But a person is altogether different, and the Bible teaches us that God is personal. He loves, thinks, cares, speaks, can be angry, can be grieved, can be delighted, and he desires our love and worship. These things certainly cannot be said of anything that is not personal.

Supremely God has revealed himself to us in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus could say to his disciples in John 14:9, *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”* The Bible teaches us that God is personal in a number of ways, but we shall just take up the way Jesus described God as *‘Father’* because that title is full of precious things for us.

1) The truth revealed to us.

The very way we use the word ‘father’ in ordinary daily use is personal. A father cares for, and walks, talks and shares with his children. And all these things point us in the same direction when we read that God is a Father to his children. Again and again the Bible brings this truth before us. One thinks of the way the Lord Jesus Christ taught his disciples to pray in Matthew 6:9, *“Our Father in heaven...”* Then the prophet Malachi wrote (Malachi 2:10), *“Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?”* David spoke of God as one who cares deeply for his children in need, especially orphans and widows (Psalm 68:5): *“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”* Another of the Psalmists put it like this (Psalm 89:26): *“You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Saviour.”* And there are many similar passages throughout both the Old and New Testaments. As a Father, God loves his children, where the world so often hates us (John 16:27). As a Father, God pities his children when we are in distress (Psalm 103:13). As a Father, God provides for his children. Every genuine need is met, especially our spiritual needs (Philippians 4:19). As a Father, God protects his children. All believers are secure; none can separate us from him (John 10:27-29; Psalm 7:10 & 59:9). As a Father, God cares for his children; therefore we can cast our cares on him (1 Peter 5:7). As a Father, God delights to draw near to his children. We are never alone (Psalm 119:151; Hebrews 13:5; James 4:8). As a Father, God even rejoices over us, which is truly amazing (Zephaniah 3:17).

2) Questions to consider.

This raises the interesting and very important questions, ‘How do we become children of God?’, and ‘How can we come under this gracious care of God as our Father?’ These questions are by no means irrelevant, because the Bible does teach us that our sin separates us from God, so how is it possible for us to have a relationship with him?

The answer to this is that God adopts sinners into his family when they come to repent of their sin and place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only means of knowing God’s forgiveness. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus are given the Holy Spirit, and he is the Spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15f):

“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of son ship (i.e. adoption). And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”

When Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians he reminded them of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world, and what his purpose was in coming (Galatians 4:4-6):

*“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law, **that we might receive the full rights of sons** (i.e. adoption). Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”*

Similarly in Paul’s letter to the Ephesian believers he wrote similar words (Ephesians 1:4-6):

“...In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

So it is that whenever someone trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, pardon, and peace with God, God adopts them into his family. It is then, and only then, that we can enjoy fully the gracious benefits of knowing that God is personal and therefore our heavenly Father.

3) Privileges to enjoy.

a. God speaks to men.

Because God is personal, again and again throughout the Bible God met with his people and talked with them. They enjoyed communion with him. He drew near to them again and again to tell them about himself. He spoke about his love for them, his faithfulness to them, his sorrow over them, even at times his anger when they had disobeyed him. But in it all God was revealing himself to them as one who is indeed the ‘living God.’ God spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16 & 3:8-9). God spoke with Noah (Genesis 6:13ff). God spoke with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-4, etc.). God spoke with Moses (Exodus 3:4, etc.). And these are just a small selection from a large number of incidents when God talked with his people. Now if God was not personal,

then he could not do this. If God was some idol or statue or object or mere power, then he could not commune with his people. Today God speaks with us through the Bible (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Peter 1:23). As we read the Bible the Holy Spirit of God speaks to our hearts.

b. Men can speak to God.

If God was not personal then we could not commune with him, which would be a disaster. It would mean that prayer was a waste of time. But, praise God, he is personal, and therefore the great privilege of praying to him in adoration and praise, in confession and intercession is both open to all who come to him through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6), and necessary for us. We are utterly dependent on him and therefore how good it is to be able to seek his help in prayer.

As an important aside, this also reminds us that God is different from the universe he has created. Some people, and on occasions very devout people, have taught that all the universe is God, and that in a way we are a part of him. But nothing could be further from the truth. God is entirely distinct from his creation, because God is personal. And that is a very rich truth.

4) The responses this calls from us.

- i. Because God is such a Father to his children, then he can and ought to be loved, adored, trusted and obeyed with all our hearts. Indeed, not to do so is a great sin and an affront to him.

- ii. Because we can only know God as our loving heavenly Father by being disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we need to become his followers immediately if we are to enjoy God in this personal way. Failure on our part will deprive us of the richest of blessings.
- iii. If God really is our Father in heaven, then we ought to take great delight in spending time with him in fellowship and prayer. Sadly, our lives at times are so full that time for God can be squeezed so that it is minimal or non-existent. How we need to guard our hearts against such a danger, and ensure that we live in the very atmosphere of prayer. This means we will walk in communion with God day by day, talking with him, being conscious of his presence. It means we will delight in the wonderful truths he tells us about himself in his word, the Bible. It means being conscious of the fact that we can entrust our hearts and lives to God and his loving care. In other words, we are to enjoy the presence of the living God in our hearts all the time. Now, to achieve this we will need to give time regularly to being alone with God to bring our specific praises and petitions to him, as well as feeding our spiritual lives by reading the Bible. Christian believers often refer to these occasions as their 'quiet time' when they enjoy God and can be alone with him.

Chapter 8 God is knowledgeable

Introduction.

Again and again the Bible teaches us that God is a God of incredible knowledge (1 Samuel 2:3):

“...the Lord is a God who knows, and by his deeds are weighed.”

When the Bible speaks about the knowledge of God we discover that it is something quite remarkable. In summary we can say that God knows everything actual and possible, the past, the present, and the future, and that he knows it all at once!

Again we see that God is so different from us. At our best our knowledge is very small. Indeed, even the most academic minds on earth know only a minute fraction of all there is to know. They may know a great deal about their particular field of study, but they do not know everything even about that, and then there are other vast areas of knowledge of which they know very little or nothing at all. Even the greatest computers in the world are very limited, and cannot know the thoughts of a man or details concerning the future of our lives or the world. But God’s knowledge is far superior to that.

1) God’s knowledge is perfect.

When God’s servant, Job, was going through great trial one of his friends name Elihu came and talked with him, and in the process he spoke of God like this in Job 37:16, *“...him who is perfect in knowledge...”* We have already seen in this booklet that God is infinite, and so is his knowledge (Psalm 147:5): *“Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.”*

God, of course, knows himself, and that alone makes his knowledge too vast for both our comprehension and our ability to plumb its depths. But it is not only that he knows himself, he also knows everything else. His knowledge is vast (Isaiah 40:28):

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no-one can fathom.”

Indeed, God himself has declared that his thoughts are much greater than anything we can ever attain to, such is the enormity of his knowledge (Isaiah 55:8-9):

“‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’”

As the apostle Paul considered these great truths about God and his ways, particularly his great plan and provision of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, he was compelled to pause and worship God in humble adoration. His response is found in Romans 11:33-36:

“Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him

and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever and ever! Amen.”

This truth that God’s knowledge is perfect has a number of important implications.

a) God does not have to learn things.

Unlike us, we have to be taught. Many of the world’s children spend hours at school learning new things. Many spend years at universities and colleges, all in the great pursuit of knowledge. Adults love to read books, and glean knowledge of world events through the various media available to us. We constantly stand in need of teachers of one sort or another. But that is never the case with God. God’s servant Isaiah put it so plainly in a series of questions he raised (Isaiah 40:13f):

“Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counsellor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?”

And then to show us the sheer absurdity of ever thinking that God needed a teacher, Isaiah went on to write (Isaiah 40:15f),

“Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust ... Before him all the nations are as nothing...”

Compared with the knowledge of God all that we can observe in the world is as dust, his knowledge is so comprehensive! He never has to be informed about anything that he does not already know about in absolute detail! No news ever takes him by surprise, as it does with us so often. No event, whether of world proportions or of personal involvement ever shocks the Lord as if he did not know about it. In a way we cannot possibly grasp, he knows everything that will take place even before it occurs (Isaiah 46:10):

“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.”

b) God knows the truth about everything and everyone.

Nothing escapes his eye. His knowledge about us is penetratingly complete! Nothing is hidden from him, nor can we hide anything from him, because he knows all things (Hebrews 4:13):

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

He knows things visible and invisible about us.

- He knows all our actions (Psalm 139:1-3): *“O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; ...you*

discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.”

- He knows all our thoughts (Psalm 139:2): “...you perceive my thoughts from afar.” (Ezekiel 11:5) “Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon me, and he told me to say: ‘This is what the Lord says: That is what you are saying, O house of Israel, but I know what is going through your mind. You have killed many people in this city and filled its streets with the dead.’” Acts 15:8 speaks of “God, who knows the heart...”
- He also knows all our words (Psalm 139:4): “Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.”
- Men foolishly think that if they do certain things in the dark then others will not know about them, they will remain a secret. But such is the extent of God’s knowledge that the day and night are alike to him (Psalm 139:11-12): “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night shall shine like the day, for the darkness is as light to you.”
- God knew all the days of our lives even before we were born (Psalm 139:16b): “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”
- God knew us even while we were developing in our mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13-16a): “For you

created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body.” (Jeremiah 1:5) “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...”

- And God, of course, knows the future, as we can see so clearly by examining the ministry of the prophets in the Bible, where details were worked out exactly as they had been foretold by the Lord. This is especially seen in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. We were told exactly where he would be born through the prophet Micah over 700 years before the event took place (Micah 5:2): “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are of old, from ancient times.” Isaiah told us in the most graphic details (Isaiah 53) that Jesus would die for sinners. The Psalmist in Psalm 22 describes the events at the cross of Calvary as if he had been present to see the very event, recording the exact words Jesus would utter (v1), and even the reactions of the crowd who hurled their insults at him (v6-8). And this was all many hundreds of years before they took place!

And there are many more similar examples of this. Indeed, the last book of the Bible, Revelation, opens with these words (Revelation 1:1):

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place.”

If God did not know all things he could never tell us what the future would hold, but the evidence is to the contrary. God has foretold events in such intricate detail before they took place, and he has done this again and again, that we are compelled to acknowledge with the Psalmist (Psalm 139:6), *“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.”*

2) Important biblical lessons to appreciate.

a) The comfort for believers derived from God’s knowledge.

When God’s children are in difficulty the Lord knows about it in great detail, and this is a considerable blessing for a number of reasons.

i. prayer

It is a great help with prayer, for we are coming to One who knows our situation better than we do, who understands all the intricacies of our difficulties and problems, and to One who, through the Lord Jesus Christ, is our heavenly Father. Consider the confidence we have in a hospital consultant when we have a serious medical problem. It would not be possible to have the same confidence in a first year medical student, who would not be able to give the

same help that a consultant could. This benefit is multiplied infinitely knowing that the God we pray to knows all about us. There can be no One better for us to commune with and confide in. And when we are completely baffled and perplexed by our needs, we can cast ourselves on our gracious God with complete confidence because he knows it all (Job 23:10):

“But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.”

Someone has said that ‘a joy shared is doubled and a burden shared is halved’, and this is certainly more than true for Christian believers who are able to unburden themselves to the Lord in prayer, with the knowledge that he fully understands.

ii. help

The God who knows all about us delights to give help to those who seek him, whatever we may be facing. He delights to strengthen those who trust him (2 Chronicles 16:9):

“For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”

These words were spoken to King Asa who had failed to rely on the Lord as he should have done, and while they were a sharp rebuke to him they also state the goodness of God. God knows not only when we are in distress or need, but also when we look to him for help, and he desires to strengthen us when we do. No cry to him, not even one uttered in a whisper or said

unspoken in our hearts and minds, goes unnoticed. He knows and loves to respond.

Jesus comforted his own disciples with this fact when he sent them out into a hostile world with the good news about his forgiveness (Matthew 10:29-31):

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

When we are in need, he knows how to provide. When we are in danger, he knows how to protect us.

iii. Christian assurance

The Lord is fully aware of all who have truly trusted him. It may be that their faith is weak and faint, but he recognises it. It may be that no other living person on earth knows that they trust him, but God does (2 Timothy.2: 19):

“...God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his...’”

And what is so amazing is that God knew all about us before we ever loved him. He knew every sin in our lives, every fall, every backsliding, and yet he still loved us and saved us. This simply magnifies the wonder of his grace even more, and is a real stimulus to praise him for his goodness, and a solid foundation for our comfort and assurance of his forgiveness. When Jesus challenged Peter in John 21 with the

question, *“Do you love me?”*, Peter rested in this fact (John 21:17): *“Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”*

b) An important warning to consider.

Those who sin and deliberately seek to conceal it will fail, because God sees all (Proverbs 15:3): *“The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.”* And we have a number of solemn examples of this in the Bible itself.

i. Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5

This couple sold land but lied over their use of the proceeds. They gave some of the money to the apostles for the Lord’s work, but said they had given all of it to the Lord, when in fact they had kept some back for themselves. Now, it was within their rights to keep whatever they wanted, but they sinned when they lied by saying they had given it all. Tragically, this couple lost their lives as God judged them for their sinfulness.

ii. Jonah, who ran away from the place where God told him he was to go and preach.

While the Lord spared Jonah’s life, he had to undergo that terrible ordeal of being thrown into the raging seas, and being swallowed by a great fish. He was firmly rebuked by the Lord for his disobedience. He learned he could not run away from God, for the Lord knows all things and no one can hide anything from him.

These are solemn examples, but they are included in the Bible to challenge us to be obedient to God, for a day is coming when God will judge the world. We need to remember the words of Hebrews 4:13,

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

The Lord Jesus Christ has told us we will have to give account for everything we have ever uttered (Matthew 12:36-37):

“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

And all our secret sins are known to him as Moses has told us in Psalm 90:8, *“You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.”*

What we always need to remember is that though God is invisible to our eyes, we are not invisible to his, and things done in the darkness of night are as plain as if done in broad sunlight to him. Consider these examples:

- When Cain killed his brother Abel in Genesis 4, no other human being saw what had happened, but God knew. It could not be kept from him.

- When Sarah laughed in her tent at the fact that God had said she would have a child in her old age, God knew and brought it out into the open, rebuking her in the process (Genesis 18:12-15).
- When, at the battle of Jericho, Achan stole some property and hid it away, others were unaware, but God knew, and Achan was exposed (Joshua 7).
- When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and tried to cover up his sin, it was a futile attempt, because God knew and sent Nathan the prophet to rebuke him for his wickedness (2 Samuel 11 & 12).
- Moses warned the people of Israel just before they entered the promised land that they were to be careful to keep God’s commandments and to live their lives in obedience to him, because failure would not go unnoticed by the Lord (Numbers 32:23): *“...you may be sure that your sin will find you out....”*

All of this points out our great need of God’s forgiveness, because he knows sins that we have not even been aware that we have committed, and therefore how needy we are. But God is a merciful God, and has promised that all who seek his mercy, and trust in all that his Son the Lord Jesus Christ has achieved through his sinless life and terrible death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, will be forgiven for all of their iniquities. The Psalmist put it like this in Psalm 130:3-4:

“If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.”

If you have never sought God’s forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ then there is an urgent need for you to do so now, because all who belong to Christ are pardoned. Paul expressed it so wonderfully in Ephesians 1:7:

“In him (i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace...”

3) Two problems answered.

There are some Bible passages that appear at first sight to contradict what we have been saying about God’s knowledge.

Problem 1:

If God knows absolutely everything, what about Isaiah 43:25 and Jeremiah 31:34 where God says he will remember our sins no more? The answer to this question is not at all difficult. This does not mean that God has no recollection of them, but instead, that he will never again bring them up against those he has forgiven, so as to accuse and condemn them. Once he has pardoned anyone, they are pardoned forever, and therefore they will never again separate us from God. It is not that God has no knowledge of them, but simply that having forgiven our sins he will not drag them up to use against us any more.

Problem 2:

When God recalls things that have taken place, what is meant by words such as those found in Jeremiah 7:31 where God says, *“nor did it enter my mind...”*? To answer this it will be helpful to look at those words in their context by seeing the verses around them. God himself is speaking, and these are his words (Jeremiah 7:30):

*“The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the Lord. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it. They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire – something I did not command, **nor did it enter my mind.**”*

These words are references to the wicked acts of ungodly people and refer not to the fact that God was in some way unaware of them, but instead that they are acts he had never ever considered committing himself or commanding others to commit. He is holy and therefore cannot and would not sin.

Chapter 8 God is wise

Introduction.

Throughout the Bible it is revealed to us that God is wise, and this is seen in direct statements telling us this, as well as by observing the things God does and the way he does them. The clear statements make unmistakable declarations about God’s character, and here are a few of them: (Romans 16:27) *“...to the*

only wise God be glory for ever through Jesus Christ! Amen.” (Job 9:4) *“His wisdom is profound...”* (Job 12:13) *“To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his.”*

1) Definition.

When the Bible tells us God is wise it means that **God always chooses the very best end or goal, and the very best means of achieving it.** And this is true of God all the time, because God is unchanging in that wisdom. Therefore he is never unwise or foolish in anything he may say or do, even though we might at first think otherwise. Samuel Medley, a Christian hymn writer, put it like this:

*“Though I cannot His goings see,
nor all His footsteps find;
too wise to be mistaken, He;
too good to be unkind.”*

Interestingly, Samuel Medley wrote those words just after he had tragically lost his baby daughter in a fatal accident. He could do so because he had come to understand something of the Bible’s teaching about the wisdom of God. He knew God never ever makes a mistake, and here again is an area where God is so different from us. We often act foolishly or unwisely. We often look back on our lives and wish we had done things in a different way. We often have regrets over our actions and words, and even our thoughts at times! The reason why we are like this, even from our earliest days, is because of what we read in Proverbs 22:15, *“Folly is bound up in the heart of a*

child...” But this is never so with God. He always does all things with perfect wisdom. He never ever makes a wrong choice. He never ever makes a mistake.

As we think of God always choosing the very best end and the most effective way to reach it, we must always remember that the ultimate end of all that God does is for his own glory (Revelation 4:11):

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

(cf. 1 Peter 4:11; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Revelation 1:6 & 5:12.) So God will never ever do anything that would dishonour himself.

2) God’s wisdom displayed.

The wisdom of God is seen in the things that God does, and we can divide that into three main areas.

a. In creation.

As we look at the world and the universe around us, which is God’s handiwork, his wisdom is seen at every point, and the Bible tells us this is something to expect (Psalm 104:24):

“How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.”

Take, for example, the order of creation as it is revealed to us in Genesis 1. Everything that man would ever require was provided before he was

created. Another example of God's wisdom is the place that the earth has in space. In relation to the sun we are neither too close so that we are burned up, nor are we too distant so that we would freeze. In wisdom God put us in just the right place. Consider also the orbit of the earth around the sun, and the tilt on which the earth spins on its axis. These combine to give us our seasons and day and night, and it is God in his wisdom who has accomplished this. Then think about the tremendous variety of plants and birds and animals and so on that we find in the world itself. How dull and monotonous it would be if everything was the same colour, or if there was only one species of bird. Again, all of this reflects the great wisdom of God. Scientists tell us that green is the most restful colour for the eyes, and in his wisdom God created so much greenery in the plants and grass that grow around the world. Even the vastness of the universe which is really beyond our human comprehension, is perfectly suited to instruct us about the greatness of God. These are just a few examples of the wisdom of God in creation. There are quite literally millions more. (See also Psalm 136:5; Proverbs 3:19; Jeremiah 10:12.)

b. In providence.

By 'providence' we mean the sovereign control that God exercises over the things that occur in our lives and in the world and universe at large. The Bible teaches us that God is always working out his plans and purposes through these events. Writing about

God, Paul spoke in Ephesians 1:11 of "...*the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...*" and the Bible tells us that for the Christian believer, the true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, God, in his providence, is actually working out all things for our good! (Romans 8:28-30):

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

The result of this is that God is at work in everything that happens, whether good or bad in our eyes, and so overrules all things that his purposes are always fulfilled, and the greatest good is brought to his people. He is so wise that he even uses the wickedness and sinfulness of men to fulfil his purposes without ever becoming sinful himself. The supreme example of this is the cross and the hatred of men for the Lord Jesus Christ. Sinful men murdered the Lord of glory, and this was the most evil act ever committed; yet by this very means of Christ's crucifixion God has accomplished the salvation of millions of people!

Peter declared this when he preached on the day of Pentecost, and speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ said (Acts 2:23-24),

“This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”

Through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, God has accomplished the forgiveness of all the sins of all his people in every generation, even though wicked men killed Jesus. Such wisdom is staggering to behold, and we can only gaze on it in wonder and amazement.

We can add to this that what was true in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ is also true in the life of the Christian believer. God in his providence is at work in everything for our good, and that even includes the experiences we consider as hard or difficult or unpleasant or painful. Consider how God used trial in Paul’s life to fulfil his great purposes for him. Paul had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan who buffeted him (see 2 Corinthians 12:8-10). And through this difficulty Paul was humbled and kept from being proud. He grew stronger as a Christian through this experience, and discovered the all-sufficiency of God’s grace for his every need (2 Corinthians 12:9). How often it has been the believer’s experience that he has learned more about

the Lord, experienced his closeness and help, and grown more like him when everything was against him! These examples we have cited are just a few of many more, but they help us to see that we can rest in the Lord our God with quiet confidence in days of turmoil, because we know that his all-wise hand is guiding us and working out his plans for us. (See 1 Peter 4:19; Deuteronomy 29:29; Proverbs 3:5-6)

c. In redemption.

We are referring here to the great work of salvation which believers enjoy through the grace of God. God planned that a huge multitude of sinful people should be rescued from their sin, pardoned, cleansed, restored, justified, reconciled, adopted, sanctified and eventually glorified. Now, to say the least, such a plan was magnificent. What greater blessing can ever be conceived? None! And that plan was entirely God’s doing from beginning to end. If left to man to sort out and devise an effective means of salvation then it would never ever be accomplished. A Christian of a former age, Thomas Watson, wrote about the way of salvation that man has neither a head to devise it nor a heart to desire it! BUT God devised this plan, because he is the only wise God.

Further, the means whereby this salvation was to be achieved also displays God’s wisdom. It was through the Lord Jesus Christ. His life of perfect obedience and his death on the cross as the sin-bearer for all who will ever believe in him, met in full the demands of God’s law, purchasing the believers’ forgiveness and

securing their salvation. To the unbelieving world this all looks like foolishness, but the truth is the very opposite (1 Corinthians 1:18-19). How, in wisdom, this great work exalts the grace of God.

In addition, God's wisdom is also seen in the way that this salvation comes to the sinner. It is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If it was by our efforts or achievements how proud we would be and how that would rob God of his glory. But God in his wisdom has secured his glory by making salvation by faith alone. Faith humbles the sinner. Faith makes the sinner look to the Lord Jesus alone and therefore honours him. Faith makes little of self and much of Christ.

We must also add that even the way that men come to believe displays God's wisdom also (Romans 10:17):

"...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ..."

And the word of the Lord is heard through the simple, yet God-ordained, method of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21):

"For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

What a weak means this is humanly speaking, and what weak creatures preachers are, but this again ensures the glory is given entirely to God. If God had sent great and powerful angels to tell us of the way of salvation we would make much of them. But God has

chosen weak frail human beings to be the instruments of bringing his good news to lost and helpless sinners, with the express purpose that no flesh should glory in his presence but give all the glory to God.

The wisdom of God in redemption is indeed remarkable, and it is God's purposes that his wisdom should be displayed to the whole universe through those whom he is pleased to save (Ephesians 3:10-11):

"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

As Paul surveyed God's marvellous work of salvation he wrote in Romans 11:33-36:

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For of him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever! Amen."

3) Application.

i. The wisdom of God should cause us to praise and adore him.

There is no one like the Lord. His wisdom towers above everyone else's to an infinite degree. His

wisdom fills us with awe and wonder and compels us to worship him.

ii. The wisdom of God should comfort and strengthen us when we are in circumstances that we do not fully understand.

This is especially true when our circumstances are difficult and hard or perplexing. We can trust in God's wisdom with complete assurance. He knows what he is doing with us, and desires only our good. To achieve that he may sometimes need to use trials, heartaches, even the hostility of others, to expose our sinfulness and create the desire within us for greater godliness. Remember the tremendous statement of faith and trust that Job uttered in the midst of all his trials. He said about the Lord our God in Job 23:10:

“But he knows the way I take; when he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.”

Although Job did not understand why all the difficulties he was facing had come to him with such severity – for he had lost his children, his possessions, and his health – yet he was sure of this, that the all-wise God knew and was using those very trials to sanctify him and eventually bless him, and he was able to rest in that fact. We can do the same.

iii. When we are aware of our lack of wisdom we can seek it from God.

Indeed, we are commanded to do so because we constantly stand in need of God's wisdom (James 1:5):

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given him.”

In this matter of obtaining wisdom from God there are a number of practical things we can do that will encourage and cultivate a spiritually wise heart.

a. We need to fear the Lord.

(Proverbs 9:10) *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* (See also Proverbs 1:7.) By the term ‘fear’ the Bible means a loving reverence for God, a godly respect for him, and a true love and affection that seeks to honour him. It means to stand in awe of him, to worship him, to rejoice in him, and to submit your life to him in loving obedience to his commands and humble submission to his sovereignty. This is the first and essential step to obtaining true wisdom. Those who kick against God, who rebel against him, who attempt to oppose him, or who deny him altogether are in Biblical terms foolish in the extreme, and therefore we must cultivate that godly fear which honours God at all times.

b. Prayer and the willingness to learn from God.

Moses knew the value of wisdom and prayed for God's help over this (Psalm 90:12): *“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”* It is no use praying for wisdom if we are unwilling to listen to what God is saying to us, first and foremost through his word, the Bible, and

also through his providential dealings with us in the events of our lives. In this verse Moses highlights our need to recognise our lives on earth are very short indeed; even if we should live over 100 years, in comparison with eternity that is nothing. Therefore if we learn that lesson it will help us to get our priorities right and ensure that we put the Lord first and prepare for eternity, and that is to be truly wise. Moses also emphasises our need for the Lord to teach us these things, for we do not possess this spiritual wisdom naturally. And that leads into the third practical thing we can do to encourage and cultivate a spiritually wise heart.

c. Humility.

The Bible teaches us that cultivating a humble spirit has the great benefit of producing wisdom in the believer (Proverbs 11:2): *“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”* The proud person thinks he knows everything and has no need to learn at all. This person’s attitude is characterised by arrogance and self-reliance. The proud person thinks he has no need of God and lives accordingly. But this is the height of folly, for in the end he will have to give account for his arrogance to the very God he has ignored! (Romans 14:12) *“...each of us will give an account of himself to God.”* By contrast, the person who is humble has a true appreciation of his own need and lack. This person realises he knows very little and has much to learn. This person’s attitude is one of

total dependence on the Lord in every area of life. The humble person knows he has a great need of God in his life – of his mercy, of his grace, of his forgiveness, of his help – and humbly lives accordingly, seeking him daily and trusting him always. This person is the truly wise person because *“...with humility comes wisdom.”*

iv. Seeking wisdom from God brings benefits to the believer now.

True wisdom cultivates a beautiful and godly life that is so different from the ways of the world we live in (James 3:13-18):

*“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. **But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.**”*

And what delightful characteristics these things are, and this is the fruit produced in the lives of those who are spiritually wise with heaven’s wisdom.

v. The all wise God and the unbeliever.

Remember, it is the fool who has said in his heart that there is no God (see Psalm 14:1; cf. Deuteronomy 32:6). Because of this there is no hope for the fool, who lives and then dies in unbelief, without Christ and without God, and therefore perishes (cf. the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21). By contrast, those who turn to the Lord are made spiritually wise, and are saved forever. There is much hope for unbelievers who have **realised** their own foolishness for rejecting Christ and seek his forgiveness for their folly, because God can make them spiritually wise. Through his word, the Bible, God delights to make **'wise the simple'** (Psalm 19:7). This is because in the Bible God teaches us about himself and ourselves, about his holiness and our sinfulness, and it is there that he also tells us about the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he sent into the world to save sinners (John 3:16). Paul put it like this (1 Corinthians 1:22-24):

*“Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, **but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**”*

And for all who turn to and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to bring them back to God by forgiving their sins, Christ becomes their wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30):

*“... you are in Christ Jesus, **who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.**”*

And that is to have true spiritual wisdom which comes from the only wise God.

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