
God's Omnipresence, Omniscience, and Omnipotence

“Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea” (Job 11:7–9).

Becoming acquainted with God will occupy our minds throughout eternity. Certainly, we cannot hope to exhaust the subject. God is incomprehensible to finite man. It is not that He has tried to withhold Himself from man. On the contrary, He longs to be known and has revealed Himself. Our failure to comprehend God is not due to any unwillingness on His part to reveal Himself, but to our limitations. Because God has condescended to reveal Himself to man, He is knowable in some measure. To know God is to have eternal life (John 17:3). It should be our constant aim to get better acquainted with God, though it is impossible to understand thoroughly His perfections.

It is said that Rowland Hill, a preacher, was

once trying to convey to his audience something of God's love. Suddenly, he stopped and, raising his eyes heavenward, exclaimed: "I am unable to reach this lofty theme, yet I do not think the smallest fish in the ocean ever complains of the ocean's vastness. So it is with me. With my puny powers I can plunge with delight into a subject the immensity of which I shall never be able to comprehend." It was a similar feeling that caused Paul to break forth in one of his wonderful doxologies: "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Romans 11:33).

This should be our frame of mind as we study the infinity of God. "Great is our LORD and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:5). The term "infinite" conveys the idea of the absence of all limitations. There is nothing beyond God's compass. He is immeasurable. Limits to His greatness cannot be imagined.

Some of God's attributes—such as love, mercy, and justice—find at least a near analogy in human beings, while others cannot even be described. For some of His metaphysical attributes, there is nothing analogous in the human mind, and our descriptive terms are inadequate to set them forth. We must use such language as we have and such illustrations as we can find, at the same time remembering their insufficiency.

OMNIPRESENCE

Let us notice first the attribute which we designate as "omnipresence." The word does not occur in the Scriptures, but throughout the Bible the fact that God

is everywhere is taught and presupposed. No idea of revelation is more difficult for man to grasp than this: the omnipresence of God. He is not limited by time or space concepts.

We know of two units of existence: God and the universe. That includes God and all that is not God. Omnipresence implies that God, one unit, penetrates and fills the other unit, the universe, in all its parts. God is everywhere. This does not mean that there is a part of Him in every place, but that His entirety is in every place. Paul declared in his sermon at the Areopagus in Athens that God "is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). He is just as near to a person on the other side of the earth this very moment as He is to us. God never needs to move to any place where He wishes to work or to answer prayer. He completely inhabits His creation. There is no place you could be in all the universe where you would be any nearer to God than you are at this very moment. Coming near to God does not require a pilgrimage, but penitence, humility, and obedience. To approach Him means to become like Him; conversely, to depart from Him means to become less like Him.

You may ask, "Isn't it true that God is in the heavens?" Yes, but not there only. "'Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?' declares the LORD. 'Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?' declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:24). Solomon said, "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). Jesus also taught that God is spirit and therefore not to be confined to any one place (John 4:24). Many have thought of God as a Being far removed from Earth, with His residence

up in the sky; but God is everywhere and can be approached everywhere. It has been said that God is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

Two words have come into use to set forth the relation between God and the universe: "immanence" and "transcendence." Keeping in mind the idea that there are two units of existence, God and the universe (God and all that is not God), "transcendence" means that God exceeds the other unit, that He is more than the world and that He is above it. Though He transcends the world, He still inhabits it and pervades it, drawing near to it in love and continuing to work in it. This is the meaning of "immanence." God does not act upon His universe from a distance.

Immanence also includes the idea of God's indwelling time as well as space. Isaiah referred to God as "the high and exalted One who lives forever" (Isaiah 57:15). The psalmist spoke of Him as the One who existed "before the mountains were born," before the earth and the world were born, and added, "Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2). This sets forth God's infinity as related to time. He inhabits eternity! He dwells in what we know as the past, the present, and the future.

OMNISCIENCE

A companion fact to omnipresence is omniscience, God's perfect knowledge. Omnipresence implies omniscience; we might even call omniscience a part of omnipresence. God is present to all and absent from nothing. He is present, therefore, with all His power of knowing. His perfect mind cannot be present without knowing that which is in His presence. In other

words, God cannot be omnipresent without knowing everything. In Psalm 139 the writer was celebrating both attributes, omnipresence and omniscience, with a reverent gladness. The idea conveyed by the psalmist is that God knows all because He is everywhere. He is everywhere in His universe and in eternity. If one cannot escape from God's knowledge, it is because he cannot escape from God's presence. One of the two units of existence, God, has perfect knowledge of the other unit, the universe. In addition, God perfectly knows Himself.

All human knowledge is imperfect. We do not understand anything completely, not even the least and most familiar thing, because we do not understand completely the whole to which each thing belongs. Our experience, therefore, gives us little aid in understanding the omniscience of God. It is unlike all knowledge that is possible to us. All our knowledge is ignorance and folly in comparison to God's. All of the combined knowledge of the wisest men who have ever lived would not add up to omniscience. Omniscience means the simultaneous knowledge of all things past, present, and future. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18; KJV). How comprehensive is the knowledge of God! Peter said, "Lord, You know all things" (John 21:17). Job said, "He looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens" (Job 28:24). Speaking of the stars, Isaiah revealed, "The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name" (Isaiah 40:26). God knows the universe in its totality.

Our God knows all things pertaining to man. He not only knows everything that has already happened,

but His knowledge even extends to what would have happened if some other course had been pursued. Jesus said Tyre and Sidon would have repented if they had seen the miracles He performed (Matthew 11:21). God knows what is in man:

The eyes of the LORD are in every place,
Watching the evil and the good (Proverbs 15:3).

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:13).

When the apostles prayed to God on a certain occasion, they addressed Him as the One “who know[s] the hearts of all men” (Acts 1:24). Jesus assured us that even the hairs of our heads are numbered and that God is aware of each falling sparrow (Matthew 10:29, 30). He also assured us of the fact that “your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). The knowledge of God includes all things and has no bounds.

OMNIPOTENCE

When Abraham was ninety-nine, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty” (Genesis 17:1). This name suggests the might and power of God. After God had promised Abraham an heir, and after Sarah had laughed at the promise, God asked Abraham this question: “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:14). Those who are acquainted with God as He is presented on the pages of the Bible and as He is seen in Jesus Christ must answer this question with a firm “No!” The power of God is the most obvious of His attributes.

"With God all things are possible," declared Jesus (Matthew 19:26). When the angel appeared to Mary and informed her that God had chosen her to be the mother of the Lord, he added, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

Miracles have attested to the mighty power of God. He was able to restrain fire from hurting Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He was able to part the waters of the Red Sea, to make an axe head float, to calm an angry tempest, and to change water into delicious wine. The creation of matter from nothing demonstrates an infinite power. God's handiwork is seen in the starry vault above; the heavens declare His glory. His power is seen in nature, in history, and in redemption. One of the greatest exhibitions of divine power was that "which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:20).

Omnipotence is closely related to God's omnipresence and omniscience. The fact that He is everywhere enables Him to know all things and to act everywhere. God is able, adequate, and sufficient. He is the Master of the universe, the Almighty, holding His universe in control. He is competent to do all that needs to be done. His power extends far above anything that He has done in human history. It operates in every way that His own nature and character call for and in all that His universe demands.

GOD DESCRIBED IN HUMAN LANGUAGE

Some passages in the Bible seem to be at variance with what has been said in this lesson. If God is everywhere, how is it that the Scriptures can speak

of Him as coming and going, much as they would a human being? We are told that He walked in the Garden of Eden, that He descended at the building of the tower of Babel, that He appeared to various individuals, and that He dwelt in Zion between the cherubim. We can explain these statements with the fact that, while God is not local, manifestations of God have been local. Also, we must realize that God's relation to space is spoken of very figuratively. To say that God comes from afar to reward or to punish man is to use human terminology in describing actions of Deity. Scholars designate such figurative expressions as "anthropomorphisms," that is, God revealing Himself to human beings in human terms.

The same is true of passages which speak of God as having bodily parts and performing human actions. He is said to have a face, eyes, nostrils, arms, and feet. He is said to smell a sweet savor, to laugh, to repent, and to be jealous of other gods. We should not understand these literally. Any characteristic or attribute of God must be described in terms man can understand, and we are to view such expressions as accommodative language. However, these metaphorical terms do imply that in the divine conduct there is something analogous to the human attributes and actions upon which these expressions are founded. The writers who used these expressions did not take them literally. If they did, then they believed that God had wings and feathers and was a tree with spreading branches, for they also spoke of Him using these descriptive terms.

PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The infinity of God is a source of much comfort

and satisfaction to the child of God. Since God is everywhere, He is in me and near me. Once Anthony Collins, a noted skeptic of his day, met a plain countryman who was on his way to a place of worship. "Why are you going to church?" Collins asked. "To worship God," was the reply. "Is this God you worship a great or a little God?" asked Collins whimsically. The unexpected answer was "He is so great, sir, that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, and so little that He can dwell in my heart." Collins later said that this simple answer concerning God had more effect upon his mind than all the scholarly volumes that had been written against Him.

God is within me! He is near to help me in every place, and to save me from every foe and trouble. ". . . The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, . . ." (Philippians 4:5, 6). We are always under our Father's eye; we may enjoy real and vital communion with Him anywhere.

If we are living close to God, His great knowledge is a source of comfort. Since He knows all, He knows me and my needs. He knows my burdens, my trials, and my problems. He knows my laughter and my tears, my sorrows and my joys, my grief and my happiness. He knows all that I need even before I ask.

Since God is omnipotent, He is able to meet my needs. He can do all things and is willing to exercise His great power in my behalf. He can answer prayer and has assured us that He will do so. Our God "is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

The infinity of God, though a source of comfort to some, is a source of terror to others. That God is

everywhere, that He knows all things, and that He has all power are great truths upon which the ungodly man does not like to dwell. Throughout the ages, men have been trying to escape from God. Every attempt to do so is just as foolish as the first, when Adam and Eve hid themselves in the garden (Genesis 3:8). Trying to run from God remains as futile today as it was for Jonah when he tried to flee from the presence of God (Jonah 1:3). Many today would not admit that they are trying to escape from God, but their lives demonstrate that they have that tendency.

We cannot escape from God by doubting or by denying His existence. Research is supreme to the skeptic, and he will not believe what he cannot prove by mathematical demonstration. He says, "I do not know whether or not there is a God." Others, bent upon personal pleasure, pursue the philosophy of eating, drinking, and making merry. They ask, "Since we have but one life to live, why not?" Some who follow this course are low and degenerate; others are law-abiding citizens. Both classes are ungodly, being without God. The majority of those about us are neither atheistic nor religious. They are average people of the community who never read their Bibles, pray only in times of great trouble, and go to church services once in a great while. They believe in the Lord's Day only as a day for personal pleasure and recreation. While the atheist says there is no God, these multiplied legions are living as if there were none. In spite of man's efforts to get away from God or to ignore Him, *God is still there!*

As usual, the world is in chaos. Our problems, many of which the wisest men on earth confess they cannot answer, are accumulating year by year.

Nevertheless, above all the dust of our little battles and quarrels, *there is God*.

The psalmist once thought of escaping from his trials.

. . . "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest.
Behold, I would wander far away,
I would lodge in the wilderness. Selah.
I would hasten to my place of refuge
From the stormy wind and tempest"
(Psalm 55:6–8).

Of course, if David had been given wings and had flown into the wilderness, he would still have experienced problems—and God would still have been there. This same David, in writing Psalm 139, pondered the glories of God and sang of His infinite greatness in a way that has reverberated across the centuries and still touches our hearts.