

## What is God Like?

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### Introduction

In the first booklet, *What is God?* we looked at the doctrine of the Trinity. It was pointed out that we cannot really think of the living God properly, unless we think of Him as existing in three Persons. Now we go on to look at the characteristics (or perfections, or attributes, as they are often called) of the Triune God. We would not know anything of His character unless He was pleased to reveal it to us. We call upon God now to give the present writer His Holy Spirit, so that what is written may be what the Holy Spirit has revealed in the sacred Scriptures. May the Lord grant His Spirit to be the Teacher of those who read this tract, that they may come to a better understanding of God and be led to fall down and worship Him as He deserves.

It needs to be pointed out that the different perfections or attributes are not so many things that make up God. Each of the perfections is 100 % true of God. Therefore, God is 100 % holy, 100 % just and so on, in all the perfections. Another thing to note is that we must not pit one perfection against another. We must not think that because God is love, that He cannot be just at the same time. God is all His perfections at the same time.

Before looking at the individual perfections, you need to know that there are three things that will be true of all of them. First, these perfections are without bounds. That is, we cannot add anything to them. If we can think of someone possessing higher perfections, then God would no longer be God. Second, these perfections of God will exist eternally, for God is eternal by nature. Third, these perfections cannot change, because God is unchangeable.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Job 11:7** Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalms 90:2** Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou *art* God.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Malachi 3:6** For I *am* the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

### God is self-sufficient

<sup>KJV</sup> **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

<sup>KJV</sup> **John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> The same was in the beginning with God.

God is a unique Being, in that He alone does not depend on any other being for His existence. No one would say of any other being in the universe, that it just exists. We always look for the source from which it came. We all have parents, for instance. The universe has a Creator. God simply **is**.

As I look out my window, I see the ground covered with snow. God has made each of the snowflakes a hexagonal shape, and yet different from one another. They are given *being* by God, but as soon as the sun shines, they melt away and are no more. They exist but for a moment, and then they are gone. It is also true of human beings that they are born, they age and die, and their bodies cannot be distinguished from the dust under our feet. As much as man likes to think he is here forever, we are reminded by millions of people passing from this globe annually, that man is not eternal. But God alone has **being** which is utterly independent, and therefore self-sufficient. He alone truly exists.

We all undergo change in our being. As one famous philosopher said, a man cannot step into the same river twice. The second time he steps into it, both the water is different since it continues to flow, and he himself has aged. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. God alone is unchanging. Let us look at one incident where this is brought out. Turn with me to

Exodus 3. In this chapter God appears to Moses in the burning bush. God is going to send Moses to deliver the Israelites from bondage to Pharaoh in Egypt. Moses asks God's name, so when he comes to the Israelites he may tell them who has sent him. God responds by saying that His name is "I AM WHO I AM". This seems like an odd response, but when we closely examine it, we realize that God is really saying I AM alone the One who has Being. God does not define Himself by mentioning anyone else, like we do, when we say "I am the son of so and so." God always IS.

God is the only being who truly exists. Everything comes into being because it has a cause, and then ages, and goes out of existence. God is the self-existing One. No one made God.

What does this really mean? First, if God existed before all things, then He does not stand in need of anything from his creatures. He was before they were created. People all over the world have brought sacrifices in worship, and some think that God is in need of them. This is foolish, for God is a Spirit (John 4:24) and therefore they can be of no value to Him. The sacrifices in the Old Testament were meant to teach us of the great sacrifice that God would make to remove our sins, when He sent His Son to die for sinners on the cross. But when people think God needs their sacrifices as if He needed anything, then God responds:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalm 50:9** I will take no bullock out of thy house, *nor* he goats out of thy folds. <sup>10</sup> For every beast of the forest *is* mine, *and* the cattle upon a thousand hills. <sup>11</sup> I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field *are* mine. <sup>12</sup> If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* mine, and the fulness thereof. <sup>13</sup> Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? <sup>14</sup> Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: <sup>15</sup> And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

Second, the truth that God alone has being that is perfect, eternal and unchangeable, is a comfort for God's people. God will never forget them. Men may make promises but they cannot always deliver them if they die. But God is faithful and all His promises will be carried out, as well as His threats. Even though it seemed like it, God had not forgotten the covenant He made

with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and so God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt. Moses may forget the sufferings of his people, live for 40 years in Midian, and even have two sons, but God did not forget, and so God delivers them through Moses.

Third, it should excite wonder and praise that God who alone existed from all eternity, should enter into covenant with creatures made of dust, here today, and gone tomorrow. Yet God has, for He is known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all those who by faith belong to His Son. This truth, my friend, is a guarantee that death will not be the last word for us and our loved ones who have trusted in God through the Lord Jesus Christ. God exists eternally and will give being even to those who have died in faith. We see this beautifully brought out in the passage in Ezekiel 37 - the valley of dry bones. Here is pictured the hope of the people who have been carried into exile. They were like dead bodies that had lain in the dust until they were reduced to skeletons, and it seemed nothing could be done. God asks the prophet Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?" and Ezekiel answers wisely, "O Lord God, You know" and he was soon to see God give being to them so the very skeletons begin to live and put on flesh and blood. Therefore, it is a comfort to every child of God, that death will not have the last word. The resurrection is the destination of every child of God who trusts in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. The Lord demonstrated this in raising Lazarus from the dead after he had been in the grave three days. The Lord's resurrection is a guarantee of the resurrection of all believers who are united to Him by faith.

### **God knows all things**

God knows everything that is possible, as well as what actually comes to pass, and all things past, present and future. Look at the following Scriptures:

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<sup>KJV</sup> **Daniel 2:22** He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what *is* in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Hebrews 4:13** Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalms 139:2** Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. <sup>3</sup> Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted *with* all my ways. <sup>4</sup> For *there is* not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Ezekiel 11:5** And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and said unto me, Speak; Thus saith the LORD; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel: for I know the things that come into your mind, *every one of them*.

We have an incident in the Old Testament that illustrates the truth that God knows all possible things even when they do not actually come to pass. Look at 1 Samuel 23:9-13:

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 Samuel 23:9** And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod. <sup>10</sup> Then said David, O LORD God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. <sup>11</sup> Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O LORD God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the LORD said, He will come down. <sup>12</sup> Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver *thee* up. <sup>13</sup> Then David and his men, *which were* about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbore to go forth.

The Lord knew the very intention of Saul - that he was going to arrive determined to kill David in Keilah. The Lord also revealed that the people would prove unreliable. In order to save their lives, they would hand David over to Saul. David, knowing this, fled from the city and as a result, Saul did not go there. The Lord Jesus was able to say what would have happened if certain cities had heard His preaching who in reality never even heard:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Matthew 11:20** Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: <sup>21</sup> Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. <sup>23</sup> And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. <sup>24</sup> But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

It is because God knows all things that predictions can be made of future events. We are told that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem many centuries before it happened (Micah 5:2). We

are told that Jesus would die on a cross, even though it was not a method of execution practiced by the Jews. They would stone a criminal to death. We read in Psalm 22:16 that Jesus would be pierced in His hands and feet long before the event took place.

The question may arise in our minds. How can God know all things, when God has created men and women with free will? This question will be answered when we consider how God knows things in comparison with men and angels. First, God does not get knowledge little by little. As Scripture puts it, “Known unto God are all His works, from the beginning of the world (Acts 15:18). Secondly, God knows because He has decreed all things that come to pass.

Look at the following Scriptures:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Acts 4:27** For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, <sup>28</sup> For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 8:28** And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 8:29** For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Thirdly, God knows all things, because Scripture makes it clear that God is everywhere present (see Psalm 139). Does not knowledge of the evil actions of men and women defile God? There are many ministers who think they ought to know what their people are watching and seeing on the Internet, and they give themselves to watching x-rated movies and pornography and end up sinning themselves. God’s knowledge is absolutely pure. Just as light cannot be defiled when it passes through a filthy room, so God remains pure as He beholds the evil deeds of his creatures.

What practical lessons can be drawn from the fact that God knows all things? First, realize that we cannot hide from God. Men foolishly think that if they do something under cover of darkness that God cannot know, but they forget that darkness is as the light to Him. “Be sure

your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23). Secondly, see the folly of hypocrisy. How many go even to places of worship with no thought of God, but just to put in an appearance, as if God does not see their hearts. Thirdly, God knowing all things should motivate us to act with the awareness that we do so in the very presence of God. Would we do the things we do or think, if we knew our children could see us? How then should we act and think, knowing God knows all things? Fourthly, if God knows all things, what comfort for God’s children under difficulties. He knows them and is fully in control of all their circumstances. Let us take comfort from this perfection as did Job when he said, “But He knoweth the way that I take” (23:10).

Once again this perfection leads us all to fear and dread, for we all have sinned against such a God. Only the knowledge that God has provided a substitute to take our sins upon Himself and has borne our punishment, will bring relief, as we flee to Jesus Christ for refuge. The gospel is the only remedy when we realize God knows all our misdeeds and will by no means clear the guilty, except by another bearing the penalty for us. Thanks be to God, that He has given us such a Saviour in His Son Jesus Christ.

<sup>KJV</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:21** For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

### **God is all wise**

God alone possesses all wisdom. So in 1 Timothy He is called “the only wise God” (1:17). Now the moral qualities of God can be imitated imperfectly by men. Men can be wise in some things, and act foolishly in other things. But God is perfectly wise. God’s wisdom is displayed in three areas.

First, God’s wisdom is displayed in *creation*. Thomas Watson writes:

We may see the glorious wisdom of God blazing in the sun, twinkling in the stars. ... If the sun had been set lower, it would have burnt us; if higher, it would not have warmed

us with its beams...If it had been all summer, the heat would have scorched us; if all winter, the cold would have killed us. The wisdom of God is seen in chequering [alternating] the dark and the light. If it had been all night, there had been no labour; if all day, there had been no rest. Wisdom is seen in mixing the elements, as the earth with the sea. If it had been all sea, we had wanted bread; if it had been all earth, we had wanted water... 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all' (Psalm 104:24).<sup>1</sup>

Second, the wisdom of God is displayed in the *works of providence*. God shows His wisdom by using weak instruments for accomplishing great ends. God cured the Israelites who had been bitten by snakes by means of a metal snake on a pole (Numbers 21:4-9). We see God's wisdom in reducing the army of Gideon from 32,000 to 300 so that God would receive all glory (Judges 7). God's wisdom is displayed when the evil of men is used for accomplishing His ends as with Joseph's brothers selling him to the Midianites. Joseph ends up in Egypt where he becomes second ruler and the savior of his family (Genesis 39-50).

Thirdly, God's wisdom shines forth in its fullness in the work of *redemption*. Who could have found a way to save man from the wrath of God, when all alike were guilty of sin? How could God be both just and save sinners? These were questions no angel could fathom. Yet praise be to God, He found a way, both to uphold His justice and yet gloriously display His mercy. God Himself became man so He could suffer the penalty and exhaust it, and thereby show mercy justly. We see the wisdom of God displayed in the manner in which Satan was defeated. It was by dying that death knew defeat. Satan, by his tempting Adam and Eve, brought death into God's perfect Paradise. God defeated Satan by taking the sting of death into His own body on the tree, so death was conquered by the death of Christ. It was by means of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that death came, because man disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden tree. It was by means of the tree of the Cross that victory came over death. Sin came

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 72.

into the world because man believed Satan's lie. Salvation comes through man believing in Christ Jesus as his Savior.

What comfort this perfection should be to God's people. First, if we believed in God being all wise, we would readily submit to Him without murmuring. Beloved, God measures out exactly what is good for us, even of pain and suffering. We supremely see this submission on the part of our Saviour, who sweat drops of blood in Gethsemane and yet said, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42).

Let the wisdom of God comfort us in our losses. If we live long enough in this world we will experience the loss of a loved one, a wife, a son or daughter, a husband or a dear friend. As Watson puts it, "God takes away these, because he would have more of our love; he breaks these crutches, that we may live more upon him by faith. God would have us learn to go without crutches."<sup>2</sup>

All of us lack wisdom. What better source to turn to in our lack than one who is the source of all wisdom. God delights to impart wisdom. We have a wonderful example in the Old Testament where Solomon asks God for wisdom:

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 Kings 3:9** Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

God not only granted him wisdom but riches besides. So let us be encouraged to pray to God to give us wisdom. James writes, "If any one lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not." (James 1:5).

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<sup>2</sup> Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 76.

## God is all powerful

Knowledge in the hands of an unwise person can be dangerous. God not only knows all things, but His knowledge is directed to wise ends. Now it is possible for someone to have both knowledge and wisdom, and yet lack the power to carry out his own purposes. This can never be the case with God who possesses all power.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Daniel 4:35** And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

<sup>KJV</sup> **Revelation 19:16** And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.  
Rom 13:1

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 13:1** Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

A. W. Pink quotes Stephen Charnock on the power of God:

The power of God is that ability and strength whereby He can bring to pass whatsoever He pleases, whatsoever His infinite wisdom may direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of His will may resolve...As holiness is the beauty of all God's attributes, so power is that which gives life and action to all the perfections of the Divine nature. How vain would be the eternal counsels, if power did not step in to execute them. Without power His mercy would be but feeble pity, His promises an empty sound, His threatenings a mere scarecrow. God's power is like Himself: infinite, eternal, incomprehensible; it can neither be checked, restrained, nor frustrated by the creature.<sup>3</sup>

Let us look at some aspects of His power. Think of the *creation*. How vast is this universe! Yet it did not exhaust God's power. The nearest star to us is some four and a half light years away. This means, light traveling at the rate of 186,000 miles per second would have to travel for four and a half years to reach that star. Our minds cannot comprehend such things. Yet there are millions of galaxies full of millions of stars in the universe God created. Thomas Watson puts it beautifully when he writes:

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 46.

To create requires infinite power. All the world cannot make a fly. God's power in creating is evident; because he needs no instruments to work with; he can work without tools; because he needs no matter to work upon; he creates matter, and then works upon it; and because he works without labour; 'He spake, and it was done' Psalm 33:9.<sup>4</sup>

In this work of creation God needed no creatures to aid Him. Listen to what God said to Job:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Job 38:4** Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.<sup>5</sup> Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?<sup>6</sup> Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

Power so belongs to God that it is used as a name of God. Jesus said that his opponents would "see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power" (Mark 14:62).

We see the power of God displayed in the *preservation* of all His creatures. There is no creature that can preserve itself for a second. No human authority can guarantee that we will rise from our bed the next morning. God alone preserves man and beast. It is amazing how man can so quickly destroy life, but it takes Almighty Power to give life. Think of the millions of abortions that take place across this globe because of man's sinfulness, yet to create life is a marvel no scientists can ever produce. God is the one "who holdeth our soul in life" (Psalm 66:9).

We see God's power displayed in the *conversion* of a sinner. Dear reader, when God created the heavens and the earth there was no opposition, for nothing yet existed. But now to convert a sinner God is opposed by forces. He is opposed by Satan who guards his property and would keep men and women as slaves. Men and women are willing slaves of Satan, and do his bidding. There is enmity in the human heart against God and so he hates the gospel of God's free grace. Some think conversion is easy. All one has to do is exercise one's free will and choose for

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<sup>4</sup> Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 78.

Christ. But ever since the fall, man is in bondage and is no longer free to choose good. Listen to the Scriptures:

<sup>KJV</sup> **John 6:44** No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

<sup>KJV</sup> **John 6:37** All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

In conversion, God by His Spirit gives life to the dead and sight to the blind, and renews their wills, so that they willingly embrace the offer of the gospel. Salvation from beginning to end is a divine work.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Ephesians 2:1** And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; <sup>2</sup> Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: <sup>3</sup> Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Ephesians 2:8** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: <sup>9</sup> Not of works, lest any man should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

We see the power of God displayed in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Never were miracles as plentiful as when our Savior walked this earth. He had power over disease, demons, death and natural forces (see Mark 4-5). Jesus cured a leper with a touch. He called Lazarus from the tomb after he had been dead four days. We see the power of God displayed in Jesus rising from the dead. Jesus said He had power to lay down His life and to take it up. This is a prerogative of God alone.

<sup>KJV</sup> **John 10:17** Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. <sup>18</sup> No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 1:3** Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; <sup>4</sup> And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

We will see God's power displayed in the Day of *Judgment*. God has already partially demonstrated His power in punishing the wicked. He cast Adam and Eve out of Paradise when they sinned. He destroyed the world with a flood. He destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet a day is coming when God's power will be manifested fully and His wrath poured out on the unbelieving when they are finally consigned to hell, and their bodies and souls preserved amidst the burning of the lake of fire.

We often are overcome by fear of man, but if we rightly judge of God's power, we will be kept from this fear:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Matthew 10:28** And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Let us not put a limit to God's power. Martha doubted Christ's power to raise her brother when he had been in the grave four days (John 11:39). We have Moses limiting God's power. The people cried out to Moses for meat and God told Moses that they shall have meat. Listen to Moses' response to God's promise to give them meat, and how the Lord rebukes Moses for limiting His power:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Numbers 11:21** And Moses said, The people, among whom I *am, are* six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. <sup>22</sup> Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?

<sup>KJV</sup> **Numbers 11:23** And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD'S hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.

We read that the Lord sent quail and there was meat for all of Israel for a whole month!

How comforting this truth is to the people of God. We have powerful enemies in Satan, the world, and our own indwelling sin. We see such strong corruption within that we wonder,

will we ever reach the eternal shore? Beloved reader, “is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14) We are kept by the power of God unto our salvation.

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 Peter 1:5** Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

God is the one who restrains our enemies, and even makes the wrath of men to praise Him (Psalm 76:10). As Thomas Watson puts it, “God’s mercy pardons us, but his power preserves us. He who by his power keeps the stars that they do not fall from their orbs, keeps our grace that it does not fail or annihilate.”<sup>5</sup>

### God is utterly holy

<sup>KJV</sup> **Exodus 15:11** Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful *in* praises, doing wonders?

<sup>KJV</sup> **Revelation 15:4** Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for *thou* only *art* holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Habakkuk 1:13** *Thou art* of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, *and* holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth *the man that is* more righteous than he?

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 John 1:5** This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

The Scriptures that head this section show that **holiness** is the name by which God is most often known. It is this perfection which is celebrated before the throne in heaven by the seraphim as they cry day and night, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3).

What do we mean by the word “holy” when applied to God? The root meaning of the word holy is separateness. God is utterly separate from all His creation because of His purity. He dwells in light unapproachable. He is also holy in relation to His creature by loving all that is

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<sup>5</sup> Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 82.

righteous and hating all that is evil. This perfection of God is brought out by the fact that everything relating to God is called *holy*. Heaven is called His holy habitation. The Sabbath is holy, the Church is holy, and God's people are holy. His angels are holy. His ministers are holy. (Deut. 26:15; Exod. 16:23; Lev. 16:33; Dan. 12:7; Matt. 25:31).

This is the perfection by which God takes an oath, to accomplish whatever He promises or threatens:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalm 89:35** Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Amos 4:2** The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.

God is holy in His nature. It is not something that He becomes, but what He has always been. Man was created holy, but he soon fell into sin and became unholy. God's holiness is the pattern for all His rational creatures, men and angels. God is the source and cause of all holiness in others. God's holiness is not to be compared with the holiness of angels or men. Man is holy but changeable, as are the angels who fell from their first state.

A question may arise, "How can God who is holy, look at the sins of others and remain holy?" Did we not read Habakkuk 1:3 which states that God cannot look upon sin? God does see all the sin of His rational creatures, not as approving it, but as Judge to punish it. God is light. There is no darkness in Him. As light is not defiled by passing through a dark room, so God is not defiled by sin.

First, the holiness of God appears in the work of *creation*. We read that man, when he was made, was perfectly holy. We see this from the communion man enjoyed with God in the garden of Eden. Man fell from a state of holiness to one of corruption of his whole nature:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Genesis 1:27** So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Genesis 1:31** And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was* very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Ecclesiastes 7:29** Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Second, we see God's holiness displayed in His work of *providence*. God cast out angels that sinned in heaven, placing them in everlasting chains awaiting the Day of Judgment. We also see it in His turning our first parents out of the garden when they ate of the forbidden tree (Genesis 3:20-24). We see God's holiness manifested in destroying the world by the flood, because of the wickedness of man on the earth (Genesis 6). We see God's righteous wrath against the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by destroying them with fire and brimstone. We see God's holiness manifested against the sins of Israel by the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70. Because of their wickedness in killing the prophets, God sent them the final prophet, His own dear Son.

Third, we see the holiness of God manifested in His *Word*. The Scriptures are called the *Holy* Scriptures, for in them God speaks. They are the instrument of sanctification. The Word of God is holy in all its commands, promises, and threatenings.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 1:2** (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)

<sup>KJV</sup> **John 17:17** Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

<sup>KJV</sup> **2 Timothy 3:16** All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: <sup>17</sup> That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalms 105:42** For he remembered his holy promise, *and* Abraham his servant.

<sup>KJV</sup> **2 Peter 1:4** Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Fourth, we see God's holiness displayed in the work of *redemption*. All the instances of His hatred against sin are nothing when compared with the display of it on the cross of Calvary,

when His own Son became a substitute for sinners. God's awful holiness is seen when God judged His own Son and did not spare Him, as He bore our sins upon His body on the tree.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 8:32** He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

<sup>KJV</sup> **Galatians 3:13** Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree:

Such, beloved, is God's holiness! He who was the delight of heaven, and the Father's only beloved Son, felt God's awful wrath and was not spared. How foolish for anyone to think that God will overlook their sin and that there need be no fear of judgment. How many preachers today boldly claim that very foolishness!

The holiness of God ought to bring terror into the hearts of men, who are born and conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5). The fact that it does not, shows how ignorant men are of the living God. They make a god after their own imagination who is indulgent of sin. My friend, if you read this and remain insensitive to sin, be warned, if God did not spare His own Son, He will certainly not spare you when He judges.

The only way we can relate to such a Holy God is by being clothed with the righteousness of His Son Jesus Christ. It is as we believe that Jesus took our sins upon His body on the tree and did away with them, and has given us His perfect righteousness which He worked out by His obedience, that we have peace with God. Not only are our sins removed, God gives His Holy Spirit to dwell in each believer, so that they are daily made holy and conformed to the image of His Son.

What impact should this perfection of God make on believers? First, we ought to hate sin with a passion, for it is the only thing in the universe that opposes God. Second, if we love God, we should imitate Him in His holiness. This is what Peter means when he speaks of believers as

partakers of the divine nature. It is not that we become one with God, but that we are conformed more and more to the moral character of God. It is this characteristic which distinguishes believers from unbelievers. So it is said, that without holiness no man shall see God. It is not our contribution, but rather it is what God works in His own, to prepare them for glory.

As we become conscious of our sins, let us daily fly to Jesus Christ who cleanses us from all sin. Let us pray as David did, "Create in me a clean heart" (Ps. 51:10). Let us keep the company of those who are holy. As Watson puts it, "Be among the spices and you will smell of them."

<sup>KJV</sup> **Proverbs 13:20** He that walketh with wise *men* shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

### God is perfectly just

God is righteous in Himself, and just in relation to all his works. He gives to every man according as he deserves. God's perfection of justice is described both positively and negatively in Scripture as we can see from the following passages:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Deuteronomy 32:4** *He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

<sup>KJV</sup> **Isaiah 45:21** Tell ye, and bring *them* near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? *who* hath told it from that time? *have* not I the LORD? and *there is* no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; *there is* none beside me.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Acts 7:52** Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 3:5** But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? *Is* God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalms 92:15** To shew that the LORD *is* upright: *he is* my rock, and *there is* no unrighteousness in him.

God, because He is just, will render to every man according to his works:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Job 33:26** He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Jeremiah 17:10** | the LORD search the heart, / try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.

The question may come into our minds, if God is just, then by what standard is He measured? If there is any standard above God, doesn't that make it higher than God, so that God is no longer God? Believe it or not, this question was debated by theologians of the past. Some said God was under law. Others saw a real difficulty with that, and said God was without law, but that would make Him arbitrary. The right response is that God is a law to Himself. He is guided by His own nature, which as we have been looking at, is holy, good, and wise. God does not act arbitrarily, one moment saying one thing and later another. God is the perfect standard of righteousness in Himself.

The justice of God is often spoken of in various ways. First, it means that the laws God institutes are perfectly just and good. It is a sad commentary on our culture, that it despises the perfect law of God. The very mention of the Ten Commandments rouses people to anger. But if we were to ask what it is they object to, no answer is given. If there is one God, then surely He rightly deserves our worship. He has a right to demand how He may be worshipped. To take His name in vain is to show hatred for Him. He has a right to tell us how to use our time, since He has given us time. No one would want others to steal, or lie, or kill, or bear false witness against them, so why is man opposed to these holy commandments? Only one answer can be given. Man is at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7). It is perfectly right for God to bind His rational and moral creatures to a law by which they are to live, and by which they will be judged.

Secondly, the justice of God means He will distribute to each man according to how he measures up to God's law. Not only acts violating the law will be judged, but also failure to perform what the law required. So our Lord summarized the Ten Commandment in loving God

with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-37).

<sup>KJV</sup> **Matthew 22:36** Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? <sup>37</sup> Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

Who among mankind can say they have loved God this way all their life? Men often think that only wicked deeds will be judged, but they forget that it is wicked not to worship the living God to whom they owe their life and all good they enjoy. Judged by this standard, all men fall short and are doomed. Only One has kept the commandments perfectly. It is the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He kept them not for Himself, but as the representative of His people. All who believe on Him, have His righteousness reckoned to them, so God sees them as those who stand just before His law. Only by this righteousness can any sinner be made right with God. We are brought into this relationship when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and our sins are reckoned to Christ, and His righteousness is reckoned to our account. In this way we are justified.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalm 143:2** And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

<sup>KJV</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:21** For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 3:24** Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: <sup>25</sup> Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

Thirdly, the justice of God means men will be rewarded for their sincere obedience even though it is not perfect. The reason God can do this, is that all that is sinful in the believer's obedience is covered by Christ's righteousness. God is pleased to reward their sincere obedience. This is not due to any merit in their works, but simply due to free grace. It is because Christ has merited all good things for His people by His obedience, that they are rewarded as both encouragement and because God delights in them.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Hebrews 5:9** And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 Timothy 4:8** For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalms 19:11** Moreover by them is thy servant warned: *and* in keeping of them *there is* great reward.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 4:4** Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. <sup>5</sup> But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 Peter 2:5** Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, God's justice will punish sinners and take vengeance on them that disobey His holy law. Now the justice of God has been displayed in providence, by the various judgments that have already taken place. It was perfectly displayed in the sufferings and death of our Savior when He stood as the substitute for sinners. Finally, it shall be manifested in the last Judgment when each is consigned to his place either in heaven or hell.

### **God is perfectly good and merciful**

It is that perfection of God's nature that He is perfectly good in Himself, and bestows on his creatures the good they are capable of receiving.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalms 119:68** Thou *art* good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 John 1:5** This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalms 52:1** Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God *endureth* continually.

Everything that comes from God is good. His laws are good. His creation is good. His providences are good. The goodness of the creature is subject to change, but only God is good in an absolute sense (Matthew 19:17). We see the goodness of God towards all His creatures in the provisions He makes for them.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalm 145:15** The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. <sup>16</sup> Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalm 136:25** Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalm 33:5** He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.

The goodness of God appeared most wonderfully when He sent His Son, born of a woman, to redeem sinners out of mankind.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Galatians 4:4** But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, <sup>5</sup> To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Luke 2:14** Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Titus 2:11** For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

Now some may question God's goodness, by asking why He did not save angels. God is under no obligation to do for all, what He does for some. Our Lord's words are a response to just such a question. "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good" (Matthew 20:15). The same answer can be given as to why not all sinners are saved.

The goodness of God is often described in terms of *grace* and *mercy*. By *grace* is meant that perfection of God which is exercised towards His elect in saving them from their sins, by the atoning sacrifice of His Son. *Grace* is shown to those who are ill-deserving, and who do not seek God's grace, and yet are made the object of eternal life. We have amazing illustrations of God's grace in the following cases. First, take the case of the thief on the cross who had lived a life of crime. He finds himself hanging on a cross next to our Savior. He is brought by the Holy Spirit to see not only his sins, that he is justly bearing his punishment, but also that the One next to Him is innocent, and is the Savior of sinners. That is why he asks to be remembered when Jesus comes into His kingdom. Jesus responds "Assuredly, I say unto you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Second, take the case of Manasseh, the king of Judah, who was an idolater and who filled Jerusalem with innocent blood as he sacrificed his own children. Yet he was humbled by God, and became a child of God by grace (2 Chronicles 33).

Third, take Saul of Tarsus, who sets out to destroy the church of Jesus Christ, and yet the Lord meets him on the road to Damascus and he is made a child of God. In fact, he becomes by God's appointment, the greatest apostle (Acts 9).

It is through our Lord Jesus Christ alone that grace flows to sinners, for His righteousness is the fountain of grace.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 5:15** But not as the offence, so also *is* the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, *which is* by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 5:17** For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 5:21** That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

The grace of God is communicated to sinners by the Holy Spirit, so He is rightly called "the Spirit of grace" (Zechariah 12:10). He is the One who gives life to those who are spiritually dead, working faith in them and showing them the Savior, so they willingly embrace Him. He is the One who melts hard hearts, and opens blind eyes, and makes the hard heart willing.

All three Persons are gracious: God the Father, in choosing sinners out of mankind who would be the objects of grace; Jesus Christ, who would be sent by the Father to work out a righteousness by which they would be justified before God; and the Holy Spirit, by applying the atoning blood of Christ to sinners.

The word *mercy* is used in various ways. First, it can be *general* mercy which extends to all men and the entire creation: "His tender mercies are over all his works" (Psalm 145:9).

<sup>KJV</sup> **Acts 17:25** Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

Secondly, there is *special* mercy which is God's goodness shown to believers and unbelievers alike, "for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Thirdly, there is *sovereign* mercy which is reserved for the elect, who are made the objects of His special love, in granting to them eternal life through the work of Jesus Christ, who was made their representative. God's mercy in saving sinners is entirely of His good pleasure.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 9:15** For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

What is the difference between the two terms *grace* and *mercy*? Grace is God's goodness shown to His creatures as creatures. It is a wider term. Mercy, on the other hand, presupposes sin. A.W. Pink gives the example of angels who did not fall into sin, but still were the objects of God's grace. God manifested His grace in electing them (1 Timothy 5:21), in preserving them from falling, and in the exalted position which are assigned to them. God showed them grace, but they stood in no need of mercy, since they never sinned.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion, what should be the response of mankind to the general goodness of God?

Paul says:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Romans 2:4** Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

It should lead all to repent of their sin and rebellion against such a good God. How inexcusable will mankind be when they face Him as Judge, having abused His goodness. Reader, are you guilty of abusing God's goodness? Then repent and flee to the Savior today. The thief on the cross abused God's goodness all his life, yet even then found salvation as he fled to Jesus for

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<sup>6</sup> Pink, *The Attributes of God*, 72-73.

refuge. Why not you? Come and you will be welcomed, for He came into this world to save sinners, and you qualify.

What should be the believer's response? Listen as the Psalmist tells us over and over:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalm 107:1** O give thanks unto the LORD, for *he is good*: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.<sup>2</sup> Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalm 107:8** Oh that *men* would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalm 107:15** Oh that *men* would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

### God is true and faithful

Dear reader, we live in a world where truth and faithfulness are rare. A man's word can no longer be relied upon. Marriage vows are easily broken. Even in the church, many who have taken vows to preach the truth, are found to be undermining it not only by word but also by their ungodly lives. How sad, when we realize we are created by God who is Truth! We have fallen far short of His glory, for we were made in His image.

This perfection, that God is truth, means that God is real as opposed to all so called gods, which are but lies (Psalm 115). He is true, so that all He says accords with things as they really are. He never misleads us. He is the very standard for truth. God not only speaks truth, He is true in Himself, which means all His promises and purposes will be come to pass.

Over against the fact that God is truth, stands Satan, who is called a "liar" from the beginning. Satan pretended to speak truth to Eve, but was deceitful and so brought upon Adam and Eve, God's wrath. God, in contrast, is true and faithful, even though Satan has so deceived many that they will not believe the truth of God, to their own destruction. Listen to Scripture's testimony:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Deuteronomy 32:4** *He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalms 57:10** For thy mercy *is* great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Deuteronomy 7:9** Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he *is* God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;

<sup>KJV</sup> **2 Timothy 2:13** If we believe not, *yet* he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Numbers 23:19** God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it?* or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Truth is so important, that one author has pointed out that two of the Ten Commandments deal with it. First, it is mentioned in the third commandment where we read: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). This commandment is often interpreted to mean that we should not use His name in a profane way, but the primary concern was in swearing falsely when taking an oath. Secondly, the ninth commandment declares, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16).<sup>7</sup>

First, we see the truth and faithfulness of God in His *providence*. All that takes place in the world is according to His truth and faithfulness to His promises:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Genesis 8:22** While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalms 25:10** All the paths of the LORD *are* mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Psalms 111:7** The works of his hands *are* verity and judgment; all his commandments *are* sure.<sup>8</sup> They stand fast for ever and ever, *and are* done in truth and uprightness.<sup>9</sup> He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend *is* his name.

Second, His truth and faithfulness is seen in His *Word*. All His promises and threatenings come to pass just as He has spoken them:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Matthew 24:35** Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

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<sup>7</sup> R.C. Sproul, *One Holy Passion* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), 151.

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 Kings 8:56** Blessed *be* the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Numbers 23:19** God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it?* or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

<sup>KJV</sup> **2 Corinthians 1:20** For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Ezekiel 12:25** For I *am* the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord GOD.

Third, the truth and faithfulness of God will be manifested in the *Day of Judgment*. Then all shall see that God has fulfilled all His promises to His people, and the wicked shall experience His threatening which they mocked.

How should this perfection of God affect us in our daily living? *First*, it gives us confidence to believe all that God says in His Word. We see it wonderfully illustrated in the life of Abraham who was a hundred years old and whose wife Sarah was passed childbearing. God came to him and made a wonderful promise:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Genesis 15:5** And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.<sup>6</sup> And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.<sup>7</sup> And he said unto him, I *am* the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

The irony here is that Abraham did not have one son, and God is promising him descendants beyond number like the stars! What was his response? We read it in verse 6. “And he believed in the LORD.” After Isaac the promised son has grown up, God commands Abraham to sacrifice him on an altar at Mount Moriah. How does Abraham respond? He immediately obeys. We see how he was thinking from the writer of Hebrews:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Hebrews 11:17** By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,<sup>18</sup> Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:<sup>19</sup> Accounting that God was able to raise *him* up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Abraham knew that God is utterly faithful, and He would even raise Isaac from the dead, rather than one of His promises fail. Oh, that the writer and reader would have such precious faith.

*Second*, it ought to give just reason for unbelievers who mock God's threatening to be in dread and flee to the Savior while it is still the day of grace. I once read a story where a missionary asked an Indian to describe how he was saved. The man, not being good with words, proceeded to illustrate his conversion. He gathered dry leaves and put them in a circle. He then picked up a worm and put it in the center. He set fire to the leaves, and with horror the missionary watched as the worm tried to escape. Not finding any outlet, it curled up, prepared for its doom. Just as the fire was about to reach it, the Indian lifted the worm from the circle. In this way I, a worm, was saved by Jesus Christ lifting me out and bearing the wrath due me, upon His body on the cross. So my dear reader, many are escaping, and so can you, if you flee to the only Savior God has provided in His Son.

*Thirdly*, truth and faithfulness ought to characterize the followers of Jesus. Jesus began His sayings often with the words *amen, amen*, which in Hebrew means truth. He not only speaks truth, He is truth. His word will be made the standard of judgment in the last day.

<sup>KJV</sup> **Matthew 7:24** Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:<sup>25</sup> And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.<sup>26</sup> And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:<sup>27</sup> And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Thomas Watson writes, "Pythagoras being asked what made men like God, answered, 'When they speak truth'. It is the note of a man that shall go to heaven. 'He speaketh the truth in his heart' (Psalm 15:2)".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, 102.

## God is love

<sup>KJV</sup> **1 John 4:8** He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. Man who is created in God's image is a social being. He is made to be in a loving relationship with God and his fellow human beings. This is reflected in the very God who has made him. God is love, because from all eternity there is love expressed among the three Persons of the Godhead. No other religion can really say God is love, for there would be no one to love before creation. For many religions God is an impersonal being, some force, or another name for the universe, as in pantheism. God in some religions (e.g. Islam and Sikhism) is so high and above His creatures He cannot come among them in an incarnation. In Christianity God is both high and lifted up, yet so intimately related to His people, that He actually takes on their nature!

John writes, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Many question this perfection of God. They say, "How can God be love, when He sends some of His creatures to hell? They have this difficulty because they invert the words and make John say, "Love is God". This is to reduce God to one perfection, but He is also holy, just, truth. There are many things that sinners experience and call love, like adultery and premarital affairs, but these very things God condemns. R.C. Sproul explains the phrase, "To say that God is love is to say that love is so much a part of the character of God and He is so loving that to express the depths of His love we must say He *is* love".<sup>9</sup> Let us look at this perfection as it is manifested in the Godhead toward the world, and finally toward the elect.

First, God's love finds expression within the Persons of the Trinity. The Son is beloved of the Father. We hear God the Father announce it at His baptism and again at His transfiguration (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). The Son loves the Father, and submits even to the death of the cross in order to glorify His Father. Isaac submits to Abraham even when he is about to slay his son in

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<sup>9</sup> Sproul, *One Holy Passion*, 161.

obedience to God's command, but the angel stops him. Jesus Christ actually does die in order to obey His Father. The heart of God is love, and it is manifested in His sacrifice. This love for the Father shines brightly when the Son hangs upon a cross. God the Father could not have loved Him more than when He was hanging on the cross of Calvary.

Secondly, God manifested this love to the world, when He gave His Son for it.

<sup>KJV</sup> **John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Donald Macleod writes, "The emphasis is not so much on the universalness of God's love as on the *worldliness* of the constituency which God loves."<sup>10</sup> This shows God loves even those who will not finally be saved. He bears long with them. God also showers many good gifts upon the ungrateful world. Everything good that sinners enjoy is a gift from God. God does not desire that sinners perish, but that they should turn and live (Ezekiel 33:11). This is the reason the gospel is to be preached to all men without discrimination. The offer of the gospel is a genuine one. We see it when Jesus looks over Jerusalem and weeps. Those, dear friend, are real tears of the Son of God and He is ready to gather them under His wings in safety, but He declares the sad words, "You would not"(Matthew 23:37). Let us pity men who reject the Savior and pray that they may yet repent and find rest under His wings.

Third, this love is manifested to the elect. It is not because they are "better" sinners. No, they equally deserve eternal death. They too were children of wrath, before they were saved by grace. The love of God toward them was manifested not after they had improved, but while they were yet enemies of God. Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:8-10). This is a comfort to God's people. He knew the worst about me, while He gave Himself for me on the cross.

This, beloved, is the God which is revealed to us in the Scriptures. Worship Him alone.

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<sup>10</sup> Donald Macleod, *Behold Your God* (Geanies House, Ross-shire; Christian Focus Publications, 1990), 180.