

DOCTRINE OF GOD: ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

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Lecture 1: The Infinite-Personal God

Today we begin a new locus which is the doctrine of God. This is the centerpiece of theology; indeed sometimes it is called “theology proper” – the study of God.

Charles Spurgeon, in his morning sermon of January 7, 1855, began with these words:

It has been said that ‘the proper study of mankind is man.’ I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God’s elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. . . . No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God. . . . But while the subject *humbles* the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. . . . Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. . . . It is to that subject that I invite you this morning.

It is also to that subject that I invite you this morning as we begin our locus of the study of the doctrine of God.

The knowledge of God is really what life is all about. In his marvelous book *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer writes the following:

What were we made for? To know God. What aims should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the eternal life that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. John 17:3, “This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment than anything else? The knowledge of God.

Packer goes on to say,

We have been brought to the point where we both can and must get our life’s priorities straight. From current Christian publications you might think that the most vital issue for any real or would-be Christian in the world today is church union, or social witness, or dialogue with other Christians and other faiths, or refuting this or that -ism, or developing a Christian philosophy and culture, or what have you. But our line of study makes the present-day concentration on

these things look like a gigantic conspiracy of misdirection. Of course, it is not that; the issues themselves are real and must be dealt with in their place. But it is tragic that, in paying attention to them, so many in our day seem to have been distracted from what was, is, and always will be the true priority for every human being—that is, learning to know God in Christ.¹

The knowledge of God ought to be our number one priority in life.

But here an important distinction needs to be made. There is a great difference between *knowing about* God and *knowing* God. Knowing about God is primarily a matter of information, whereas knowing God involves a first-hand personal experience and involvement. To illustrate: suppose that you are a single young man and I had a crystal ball into which I could look and reveal to you what the woman you will someday marry is like.² I could tell you what she looks like, her likes and dislikes, her strengths, her weaknesses, her talents, her intellectual abilities, and her spiritual maturity. You would know all about her. But could you truly say that you know her? I don't think so at all. There is no personal relationship between you and her. In fact, you might even say upon hearing my revelation, "Wow, I can't wait to get to know her!" There is a huge difference between knowing about someone and actually knowing that person. Through the crystal ball you might know all about her, but then someday she will walk into your life and you'll get to really know her on a personal level.

It is exactly the same way with God. We can know a lot about God, and yet not really know him well or at all. In this class, I can help you to know about God. I can give you information about God – his nature and existence. But, unfortunately, my ability to help you to know God is limited because it is up to you to do the knowing. Nobody else can do that for you. To think of the illustration of the young man again, maybe I could by my crystal ball tell you all about your future wife, but I couldn't give you that intimate personal relationship with her that you would want to have. You have to do the loving, caring, building, communicating yourself. It is exactly the same way with God. I can give you a lot of information about what God is like so that you can know more about him, but only you through your personal engagement can get to know God better for yourself.

Someone might say, "Then what good is it learning all this doctrine and information about God if it isn't sufficient for really knowing him?" Well, think about it. It can be very helpful to know about someone if you are trying to get to know that person personally. For example, it would be very helpful – wouldn't it? – to know that someone has, say, a poor self image that causes him or her to act in certain ways. Or it might be good to know that someone can be trusted with a secret. If we hear that this person is a

1 J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), p. 314.

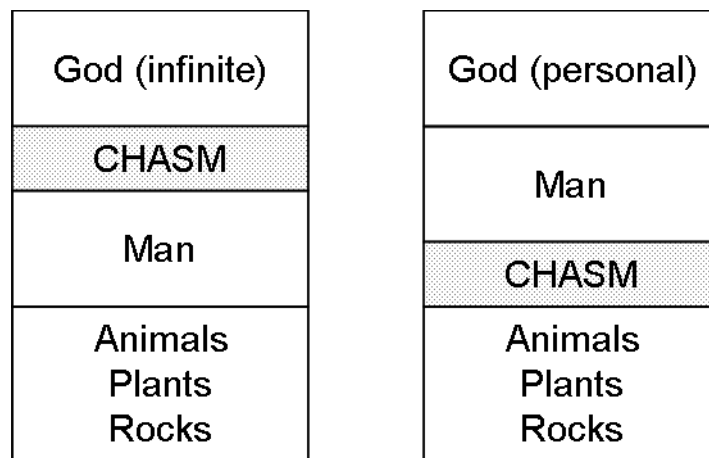
2 5:05

loyal and dependable friend then it will be much easier to want to get to know him and to commit ourselves to him. It is the exactly the same way with God. Once we correctly understand what God is like then it will change our lives.

When we grasp God’s love then we will be drawn to him in turn and want to respond and love him. When we truly comprehend God’s holiness then we will turn away from our sins with loathing and will reverence God with awe. When we understand God’s aseity then we will fall on our faces before him in humility. When we see God’s power then we will go forth for him in confidence and triumph. When we learn of God’s omniscience then we can trust him and his guidance as we go through the trials and valleys of life. We can quit depreciating ourselves and understand and accept ourselves rightly as those who are beloved by God. So I think you can see that knowledge about God can be very helpful indeed in getting to know God.

Who is this God, then, that reveals himself to us in the Bible? He is the infinite-personal God. God is, on the one hand, an infinite being. On the other hand, God is also a personal being. The God of the Bible is the infinite-personal being. This is in contrast to the gods of many other religions in the world. For example, the gods of Greco-Roman mythology were certainly personal beings, but they were not infinite.³ The god of Eastern pantheism like Hinduism and Taoism is infinite but this concept of god is not personal. What the Bible says is that God is both infinite and personal.

Insofar as God is infinite, there is a great chasm that separates him from everything else in all creation including man, animals, and inanimate life. God stands alone as the infinite being. On the other hand, insofar as God is personal, man (as made in the image of God) finds himself on God’s side of the chasm that separates him from all of the rest of creation which are not persons.



Infinite-Personal God

So you have this very interesting concept of God in Judaism and Christianity as a God who is infinite (and therefore unlike all the rest of creation) and yet who is also personal (and therefore can be known in a personal way).

In our first section of this class we want to look at those attributes of God which are his in virtue of being an infinite being, and then we will later look at those attributes of God which are his in virtue of his being a personal being.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism describes God in the following terms: “a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” We want to look at those attributes, or properties, of God which are his in virtue of his being an infinite being. In one sense this distinction is artificial because God has all of his attributes to an infinite degree, but nevertheless he has certain attributes which are not his in virtue of his being personal. We will look at these separately.

A lot of times you will hear people in our culture say, *You can't really know anything about God. If God does exist, you can't say anything about what he is like.* For these sorts of people, God is just a sort of nebulous force or something of that sort, not something that can really be described. But in reality such an entity would be a non-being. Anything that exists in reality has attributes or properties that make it what it is and to describe it. So a God that literally had no attributes or properties would be non-existent. Anything that exists has certain properties or attributes.

The 19th century German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach expressed this point well when he wrote:

A being without qualities is one which cannot become an object to the mind; and such a being is virtually non-existent. Where man deprives God of all qualities, God is no longer anything more to him than a negative being. To the truly religious man, God is not a being without qualities, because to him he is a positive, real being. The theory that God cannot be defined, and consequently cannot be known by man, is therefore the offspring of recent times, a product of modern unbelief. . . . On the ground that God is unknowable, man excuses himself . . . for his forgetfulness of God, his absorption in the world: he denies God practically by his conduct, – the world has possession of all his thoughts and inclinations, – but he does not deny him [God] theoretically, he does not attack his existence; he lets that rest. But this existence does not affect or incommode him; it is a merely negative existence, an existence without existence, a self-contradictory existence, – a state of being, which, as to its effects, is not distinguishable from non-being. . . . The alleged religious horror of limiting God by positive predicates

is only the irreligious wish to know nothing more of God, to banish God from the mind.⁴

So God, as an infinite-personal being, must have certain qualities that make him the kind of being that he is.⁵ The question then is: what qualities are these? What are these properties that God has? Here, fortunately, God has not left us to work this out by our own ingenuity. Rather he has revealed himself to us in his Word. The Bible is not a philosophy book or even a book in systematic theology, but it is the story of God's acts in human history, revealing to us what God is like, what this person with whom we have to do is like. So it is to the Bible that we will want to turn in order to discover what God is like. We will examine four of the infinite attributes of God.

Two controls help to guide this inquiry into the divine nature. First is *Scripture*, and then second is *perfect being theology*. I've already said that Scripture will be our guide in seeing what God has revealed to us about himself. But for thinkers who are in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the concept of God enunciated by St. Anselm as the greatest conceivable being (or the most perfect being) has guided our theological reflection upon the raw data of Scripture so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in the greatest possible way – in a way that would serve to exalt God's greatness. So when the Bible says, for example, that God is all-powerful or that God is all knowing, we should take this attribute to the greatest possible degree that we can and that is coherent – to say God is omnipotent and omniscient and to construe these attributes in ways that would exalt God's greatness.

Since the concept of God is underdetermined by biblical data – that is to say, the biblical data do not always make it clear how we are to understand God's attributes – and since what constitutes a great-making property is to a degree debatable, theologians and philosophers who work within the Judeo-Christian tradition have a considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblical faithful doctrine of God.

To give just one example of this, the Bible affirms clearly that God is eternal, but it doesn't make clear whether this means that God is infinite throughout all time or whether God transcends time all together. The biblical data is underdeterminative with respect to how we grasp or understand divine eternity. This is also an attribute where I think it is not clear whether it is greater to be timeless or to be infinite throughout all time. This is a matter of debate among philosophers and theologians. So this would be one example of where Christian theologians and philosophers have differed in their doctrine of God. They all affirm the core doctrine that God is eternal but some will maintain that God is atemporal (that is, he exists beyond time), others will say, no, God is omnitemporal and

4 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 1841

5 15:44

exists throughout infinite time. Both of these would be acceptable as Christian doctrines of divine eternity.

Our exploration of the divine attributes will be guided by these two constraints – Scripture and perfect being theology. What we will want to do is to look first at the scriptural data relative to any particular attribute, and then we will look at an application of this attribute, a systematic summary of it, and its impact on our lives.⁶

START DISCUSSION

Student: Don't we have to also contemplate all that we know of this realm here – the world, the physical universe, the history, all aspects of it – and in light of that still show God is perfect throughout time?

Dr. Craig: Yes. What is driving the question? That seems clear to me.

Student: It seems like we can get detached from the world and come up with a systematic theory; we have to tie it down to all of what we know of this world.

Dr. Craig: OK. I think that is right. Take the example of God's eternity again. Since the biblical data is underdeterminative, and it is not clear whether timelessness or omnitemporality is the greater property, we are going to have to look at this in terms of what we know about time. What does modern science tell us about time? What does our experience of time tell us? We reflect upon this in order to try to enunciate a doctrine of divine eternity that will take account, not only of the biblical data, but also all that we know about the nature of time so as to have a coherent theology.

Student: Can you repeat that quote from St. Anselm?

Dr. Craig: I didn't actually quote Anselm, but what Anselm said is that God is the greatest conceivable being. He said God is *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* – that than which a greater cannot be conceived; or more simply put, the greatest conceivable being. This is the Anselmian concept of God. God is the greatest conceivable being. I think that is a right definition because if you could think of something greater than God, then that would be God! So by the very concept of who God is, he must be the greatest being conceivable, or you are not really talking about God. You are talking about some lesser thing.

END DISCUSSION

Our first attribute that we want to look at is God's aseity or self-existence. Rather than plunge into that at this point, I think we will finish early today. We will open that for discussion next time.

*[Closing prayer]*⁷

Lecture 2: Aseity

Today we begin our study of the attributes of God. This is really my favorite section of theology. We are going to begin by looking at some of the infinite attributes of God; that is to say, those which are God's, not in virtue of his personhood, but simply in virtue of his being an infinite being.

The first attribute that we want to examine together is God's self-existence or, as it is more properly called, God's aseity. Aseity comes from the Latin words *a se* which means "by itself" or "in itself." The idea here is that God exists *a se*; he simply exists in himself. Or, as I put it here on the outline in English, God is self-existent.

Let's begin by looking at some of the scriptural data that indicate that God is a self-existent being. Let's begin in the Old Testament by looking at a passage from the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 40:17-23, 28a. This is Isaiah's polemic against pagan idolatry. He mocks the idols in contrast to the God of Israel who is the uncreated Creator of all things. So, in Isaiah 40:17 and following we read:

All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness. To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? The idol! a workman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts for it silver chains. He who is impoverished chooses for an offering wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skilful craftsman to set up an image that will not move. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nought, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. . . . Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

Here Isaiah portrays God as the uncreated Creator of all things and compared to God these other things are as nothingness and as emptiness next to God. God in Isaiah's conception is unique as this uncreated self-existing being.

Turn over in the New Testament to Revelation 4:11. Here is the praise that is given to God in heaven: "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." Here God is said to be the creator of all things; they exist by his will.

One of the most important passages for the attribute of divine aseity is John 1:1-3. Here John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word

was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”⁸ Here John says that at the very beginning (he is harking back to Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and Earth;” as it were, prior to creation, in the very beginning) all that exists is God and his Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning. Then everything else comes into existence through God’s word. All things were made through him. The verb here can also mean “to come into being.” So this could be translated “all things came into being through him.” So at the very beginning you have God and his Word as self-existent and then everything else coming into being through the creatorial power of God’s Word.

These are some of the most important passages testifying to God’s self-existence and his being the source of the existence for everything that exists apart from him.

According to the Scripture, God not only created the world initially, but he also preserves it in being. Look at Nehemiah 9:6. Ezra said:

Thou art the LORD, thou alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and thou preservest all of them; and the host of heaven worships thee.

Here Ezra says not only that God is the one who has brought into being initially heaven and the Earth and everything that is in them, but also he preserves them in being. God is not only the initial creator billions of years ago, but he also is the conserver of these things in being moment-by-moment as they endure.

The Scripture thus testifies that God is the source, the sustainer, and the goal of all reality outside himself. Romans 11:36: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” Notice here that all things are from God; he is the source of their being. They exist through him; he sustains them in existence. And he is the end of their existence; he is the goal toward which all things tend. God is the source, the sustainer, and the goal of all things other than himself. One might compare in this connection Hebrews 2:10. Hebrews 2:10 refers to God as the one “for whom and by whom all things exist.”

God, by contrast, didn’t come from anywhere. He didn’t come into being at all. God just is. He just exists. Psalm 90:2 says, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.” Here the psalmist imagines God existing as it were before creation, before anything had been brought into being. He says God just is. From everlasting to everlasting God exists.⁹

8 5:19
9 9:50

One might compare in this connection the revelation of the divine name to Moses in Exodus 3:14. You'll remember when Moses presses God as to his name, God says, *Tell them 'I am that I am' has sent you to them.* That is God's name. He is the self-existent being. I am that I am.

It is interesting that in the New Testament all of these same qualities (being self-existent, the source and sustainer and goal of all created things) are also ascribed to Jesus Christ. Christ is said to possess these same properties.

Look at some representative verses. 1 Corinthians 8:5-6. Paul writes:

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords' – yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Notice how the description of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are so similar. God the Father is described as the one from whom and for whom we exist, and Christ is the one through whom we exist. So Christ is God's instrument in sustaining the world in being.

Look also at Hebrews 1:1-3a:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.

Here, again, Christ is described as bearing the imprint of the divine nature, and then carrying out this quality or this role that belongs properly to God of creating the world and sustaining it in being.

Finally, in Paul's letter to the church of Colossae – Colossians 1:15-17 – Paul says:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

So I think that you can see that this property of being the self-existent source of everything else is attributed to Christ as well as to God the Father which is a tremendous affirmation of the deity of Christ – of his full divinity.

Let's discuss this attribute and see if we can systematize and understand it.

The Bible is affirming that God is a self-existent being. Minimally that would mean that God doesn't depend upon anything else for his existence. If everything else were magically to disappear, God would still be there. He exists independently of anything else.

I think aseity or self-existence is even stronger, even more robust an attribute than simply existing independently of other things.¹⁰ Aseity means that God exists by a necessity of his own nature. That is to say, it belongs to God's very nature to exist. He doesn't just happen to exist and happen to be independent of everything else. Rather, God exists by a necessity of his own nature. So if God's nature is possible – if it is logically possible for God to exist – then he exists. He exists by a necessity of his own nature.

If that is right, what this implies is that the attribute of divine aseity entails two other important divine attributes. First, God's eternity. If God exists by a necessity of his own nature then it is impossible that God would ever fail to exist, and therefore that he could come into being or go out of being. If God exists by a necessity of his own nature then he will exist permanently without beginning or end. That is to say, he will be eternal. God's attribute of being eternal is entailed by his aseity.

Another important attribute of God that would be entailed by aseity would be God's necessity. That is to say, God is not a being that just happens to exist in this world (the actual world) but fails to exist if some other possible world were actual instead. Rather, God exists necessarily. That is to say, he exists in every possible world. No matter which world you might imagine could have been actual, God exists in that world. There is no possible world in which God is absent. God exists in every possible world because he exists by a necessity of his own nature. So if his nature is even possible then God will exist in every world.

So God is not merely an eternal being. He is much, much more than that. He is a necessary being. He is a being which must exist, a being whose non-existence is impossible. This is appropriate to the concept of God because God is the greatest conceivable being. We saw that St. Anselm's concept of God which helps to guide systematic theology is the concept of a greatest conceivable being, or a most perfect being. A most perfect being – a greatest conceivable being – would be a being which doesn't exist merely contingently, but one that necessarily exists because it is obviously greater to exist necessarily than to just accidentally happen to exist.

Moreover, several of the arguments for God's existence that we will be talking about later in this class imply the existence of a necessarily existing being. For example, the Leibnizian argument from contingency that we will talk about is that in order to explain

why something exists rather than nothing there must be a metaphysically necessary being whose non-existence is impossible. Therefore that argument implies the existence of a necessary being. Or again, the moral argument that says objective moral values and duties need to have some kind of a foundation in God as the ethical ultimate, as The Good. Since many moral truths are not just contingently true but necessarily true, the foundation for morality cannot just exist in some possible worlds; it would have to exist in every possible world in which there are those moral truths. So to ground moral values we must have a being that is metaphysically necessary. Or again, there is an argument for God's existence called the conceptualist argument for God's existence which says that God must exist as an omniscient mind to ground mathematical and logical truths like $2+2=4$. In order to ground the truth of these necessary truths you would need to have a necessarily existent being because there is no possible world in which those statements fail to be true. So if God is the ground of these logical and mathematical truths he must be as necessary as they are.¹¹

It seems to me that this concept of aseity, as being a being which exists by a necessity of his own nature, is one that not only properly belongs to the concept of God as a greatest conceivable being but we actually have some good arguments for thinking that such a being exists. We will review those arguments later in the class, but I want to simply preview these at this point by saying that the notion of God as a self-existent being (one that exists by a necessity of his own nature) is one that makes good sense.

START DISCUSSION

Student: During the 1960s there was a group of so-called theologians at Emory University that talked about the death of God. Did they address any of these qualities that you just described? Did they make any attempt to undermine traditional thinking about the nature of God?

Dr. Craig: One of these theologians was Thomas J. J. Altizer who proclaimed the death of God. It is not clear the extent to which they may have simply meant that the concept of God is now dead in American culture or intellectual culture, and therefore of no use. They couldn't have seriously entertained the idea that a being which exists *a se* (eternally and necessarily) could have died. That would be patently absurd. So while I am not familiar with the death-of-God theologians with respect to what they might have said about these attributes, I don't know that they really seriously dealt with them. Clearly, the notion that God could literally cease to exist is absurd if he has these sorts of attributes.

Student: Can you please explain the relationship between aseity and eternity and necessity just one more time?

Dr. Craig: If something exists independently of everything else and exists by a necessity of its own nature then it would be impossible for it to come into being or go out of being because if it did it wouldn't be necessary. It wouldn't exist by a necessity of its own nature. So if something exists by a necessity of its own nature – if it is literally self-existent in that sense – it has to be permanent. That is what eternal means. The core concept of eternity is permanence. Now, there is debate that remains – does God's permanence mean he exists everlastingly throughout infinite time, or does it mean he is outside of time altogether? That is a further debate that we will talk about. But the core concept of eternity is the idea of permanence – not coming into or going out of being. I think it is clear that that would be entailed by the idea of existing by a necessity of your own nature.

Student: In case some people are having a problem getting their mind around this existing by its very nature, I still have a problem with that, and I never could actually come to grips with it. Here is how I finally solved the fact that God does have to exist. I am not a necessary being. There is an infinite number of things that could have happened to keep me from existing. God is a necessary being in my mind because he had no beginning. Anything that has no beginning has to be necessary because nothing could have happened to prevent its creation or prevent its being here. Whereas in my case, many things could have happened to me. If something has no beginning then it has to be here.

Dr. Craig: I want to try to expand your concept of God to make it even more majestic – even richer – than what you just expressed. You certainly are right in saying that my dependence upon all these other factors show that I am not necessary in my existence. I could cease to exist easily. Therefore, if God is self-existent he will be eternal. That is right. He will be permanent in this world. But being eternal doesn't imply necessity.¹² Necessity means that no matter which world were possible, God would be there as well.

Let's imagine, by using these circles, different possible worlds. [*Dr. Craig draws several circles on the whiteboard to represent different possible worlds.*] Let's call the actual world "Alpha." [*Dr. Craig now points to different circles on the whiteboard.*] This would be a world, say, in which Bob exists. This would be a world in which, say, Bob does not exist. This would be a world in which Bob exists but Bryant Wright is not the pastor at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church. This would be a world in which Bob exists but Brad does not exist. You can see all of these would be different possible worlds.

Now, in Alpha, which is the actual world, God exists without beginning and without end. So, as you say, God is eternal in the actual world. Nothing can bring him into existence, nothing can make him go out of existence. But what about this world over here – world W'? [*Dr. Craig points to the circles on the whiteboard again.*] Or this world W''? Does

God exist in those worlds, too? The idea of necessity is that he is not just in this world – the actual world – but he would exist no matter which world were possible. So necessity is something that is even greater than eternity. The idea that necessity is eternity is an Aristotelian idea, but theologians in the history of thought developed this notion of God as metaphysically necessary, not just eternal, but a being whose nature is such that if it is possible it must exist.

Student: This may just indicate the limits of my intelligence, but when I start hearing about all possible world arguments, I immediately reject that. There is only one possible world and that is the one we have.

Dr. Craig: See, that is not right. If you say that then that means that everything that happens happens necessarily. You couldn't move your little finger because that is not possible. There is only one possible world. Now, you are right, I think, in saying these other worlds don't exist in the sense they are not actual. That is true. But they are possible. You could knock over your glass. Brad can hit you in the head. If he did then it would be a different world. So I don't think you are really a fatalist who thinks everything is logically necessary.

Student: Whether I hit Brad or don't hit Brad, that has nothing to do with a possible world. Those are actions within an existing world. They don't have anything to do with another world. I can imagine a world in which the sky is orange on Thursday.

Dr. Craig: Good! OK!

Student: But that is not a possible world.

Dr. Craig: Why not? Do you think that is possible that the sky could be orange?

Student: The only way that world could exist is if I could talk God into creating that world. He obviously didn't want that world. He didn't create it. There is no way any other world than this one could actually occur. You can imagine all the worlds you want, but they can't exist.

Dr. Craig: Oh, but it could! Suppose there is a possible world in which I step off of this podium.

Student: It's the same world!

Dr. Craig: No, it is not! I didn't do it! I prevented that world from being actual by my free choice. You are right – I think what you are wanting to say is this. There is only one world that is actual. Right! There is only one world that is actual. But, things don't have to be this way. Otherwise, you'd think everything happens by logical necessity. You've got freedom, there are lots of contingencies, God could do different things. And if they were different then there would be another world that is actual, not this one. I am not

saying these other worlds are actual. We agree about that. But it is possible that the world could have been different. What I am saying is, with respect to God's necessity, no matter how the world might have been God would be there. That is a richer concept than just being eternal because God could be eternal but if the world were slightly different he might not be there at all or he might have only existed for a few years or something. So this idea of necessity – we need to get a handle on this, I think, if we are to have an adequate concept of who God is.¹³ He is greater than just an eternal being.

Student: Instead of thinking that God and the world were different entities, maybe we should think that the world is a subset of God.

Dr. Craig: Be careful! You don't want to be a pantheist or a panentheist where you say the world is part of God, because then God is not distinct from creation. Some of the verses we read this morning say that God is in the beginning and then he brought everything else into being. So the Judeo-Christian view is very different from these pantheistic or panentheistic worlds which say the world is part of God.

Student: Everything stems from God, so the world is God's expression. So God expressed into the world – he can imagine, he can will it, and he can actualize it. Actually the world is a subset of God – the overflow of God.

Dr. Craig: Well, I would really resist that conclusion you want to draw from that. I think it would be better to say that the world is the free creation of God. That is different than “overflow.”

Student: It is like a painting is the artist's creation. It is conceived by the artist. So the world is God's creative work. That is a subset of God.

Dr. Craig: But it is not! The painting is not a subset of the artist. Right? The painting is not a subset of the artist.

Student: Yes! I would say.

Dr. Craig: All right, then you are using the word “subset” in a very idiosyncratic way.

Student: An expressive way.

Dr. Craig: All right, it certainly is an expression of his existence. But we have to be careful about how we define our terms. That is not the normal way “subset” is understood. “Subset” would normally mean something like this: take the set of all natural numbers: {0, 1, 2, 3 . . . }. A subset of that would be all of the even numbers: {2, 4, 6, . . . }. It belongs to the other one in that it is taken out of it. God's relationship to the world is not like that. It is more like the artist and the painting or the sculpture that he creates.

Student: When we are talking about eternity, are all of his creations eternal? So you have plants, animals, angels. It talks about at some point Satan being in the lake of fire forever. My question is: how did we begin in one place and why don't we end at some point? Or why don't evil beings, or beings that were created for good but morphed into evil, why don't they end at some point, as far as you understand in the Bible?

Dr. Craig: There is a number of questions there. The first one was whether creation is eternal. Some of the verses we read already suggest that that is not the case. "In the beginning was the Word." John 1:1. Then it says, "All things came into being through him." So there is a state of affairs in the actual world which is just God existing alone without anything else. Then everything else comes into being. Again in Colossians, "He is before all things, and all things hold together." I think that means not simply that he is before them in the sense of rank but in the sense he brought these things into existence. So creation has a beginning point in the past. It is not eternal in the past. There is a beginning.

Will these things come to an end? This gets into your doctrine of immortality. Do you think that God will simply allow the creatures that he has made to lapse back into non-being? Will he just annihilate them all? He certainly would have the power to annihilate them if he wanted to.¹⁴ But the Scripture says that, with respect to those whom Christ has claimed for himself, those who believe in him will not perish but shall have everlasting life – John 3:16. They will live forever. They will never be annihilated. They will go to be with Christ in a new heavens and new Earth.

What about the wicked? You mentioned the evil. Well, this is an issue on which Christian theologians differ. Some hold to the view that God will annihilate the wicked. They will be destroyed completely so that they cease to exist. All that will be left will be God and the redeemed. But the more traditional view, and the view I've defended in our section on the doctrine of the last things, is that the wicked will not be annihilated. They will be punished forever for what they've done. In that sense, even wicked creatures, whether demons or human persons, will not be annihilated by God but will be justly punished for what they have done during this lifetime.

Student: I have a number of thoughts. My head is exploding right now. Aside from that, draw a circle on the board that is the set "God."

Dr. Craig: OK, God is not a set.

Student: That is correct. God is not a set. You could draw any point outside of that circle, and is that not God? You can't do that with God.

Dr. Craig: Yeah, you can.

Student: There is no point you can draw that is not God.

Dr. Craig: Sure you can! You are not God! Bob said he's not God!

Student: I exist in him of necessity.

Dr. Craig: No. Do you think God had to create you?

Student: No, no. That isn't what I'm saying.

Dr. Craig: OK, then you don't exist in him of necessity.

Student: If I had a beginning, which I did (or I believe I did – there are some people who may not agree with that but they belong to other religions), the Bible says if I accept Christ I will have no end. I will live forever with him. As far as the annihilation of the evil, I've gone back and I can't picture in my wildest dreams even Adolf Hitler, as evil as he was, a fair and just God condemning him to an eternity in hell. I would think his punishment would be limited. It may be limited to having to live 20 million lives of all the people he persecuted individually one at a time, which would be a very long time. But in the end my view is God just lets him be where God has chosen not to be present.

Dr. Craig: That is though the typical concept of hell. The presence of God is utterly removed. But Hitler will still exist on that view. You are not saying he is annihilated.

Student: No, I don't think he is going to be annihilated. But I am just saying "punished" is a word that has very specific meaning for me.

Dr. Craig: This was addressed in our section on doctrine of the last things, so let me refer you back to that section again. It is on the website if you care to look at the lessons there. But I will say briefly two things.

First, I think that we can plausibly agree that every sin only deserves a finite amount of punishment, as you said. But if a person commits an infinite number of sins then he would deserve an infinite punishment. Nobody commits an infinite number of sins in this life, obviously. But what about in the afterlife? Insofar as the denizens of hell continue to hate God and reject him, they continue to sin. So they accrue to themselves more punishment. In that sense, hell goes on forever because sinning goes on forever.

The second thing I would say is it is not clear to me that every sin does deserve only a finite punishment. I think that is true of sins like adultery and murder and things of that sort. But what about the sin of rejecting God? For the creature to shake his fist in the face of his creator and spurn him and reject him; it seems to me that that is a sin of infinite gravity and consequence, and plausibly deserves an infinite punishment.¹⁵ If that is right, we shouldn't think of hell primarily as punishment for the array of finite sins that we've

committed. Christ has died for those sins. The penalty for those have been paid. Rather, hell would be the just punishment for a sin of infinite gravity and consequence which would be the creature's rejection of God himself. So for that reason I don't think that the idea of punishing the evil forever is an example of punishment not fitting the crime.

I would conceive of that punishment, not so much as torture racks and pinchers and hot coals, but as sequestering the wicked forever from the presence of all that is good and lovely, all that is from the presence of God himself. That is a horrible punishment, I would say.

END DISCUSSION

Let me, in the interest of time, say a few more words and then bring this subsection to a close.

If God is a self-existent being then all finite reality depends upon him for its creation. There is no other self-existent being besides God. He is unique in that sense. So everything apart from God depends upon him for its initial creation coming into being, for its present existing, and then for its future being on into the future. So reality is shot through with a radical dependence of everything upon God – for its creation, its conservation, and its future being.

An analogy to this might be the way in which a dream is sustained in your mind when you are asleep and dreaming. Your dream can be populated with all sorts of persons who are engaged in activities, doing different things, and yet the instance you awaken that dream vanishes and all those people and everything just evaporates instantly. It is gone. Obviously, I am not saying that this world is a dream. Don't misunderstand me. I am not saying the world is a dream in the mind of God. But I am saying that it is radically dependent upon God in exactly the same way that a dream world would be dependent upon your mind. If God were to cease thinking about the universe, it would be annihilated; it would vanish in an instance.

So if there is no God, there is no universe. On the other hand, if there were no universe, God wouldn't be affected because he is self-existent and independent. Nothing could make God cease to exist. On the contrary, everything that exists other than God depends upon God for its being. God is a being which is self-existent, eternal, and necessary, and everything else that exists is going to be contingent and dependent upon God in its being.

This understanding of God's self-existence can help to solve two problems. First, sometimes it has been said that if God is a being, then he is just one being among others. He is just one more marble in the sack if God is a being. So God can't be a being. I think understanding God's self-existence enables us to see the fallacy of that reasoning. All other beings are dependent upon God for their existence. God alone is a self-existent,

necessary being. Everything else that exists is a contingent, dependent being. So God is not just one more marble in the sack; rather, everything else depends upon him for its being. He is not just one being among many.

The second problem that this helps us solve is the old question, “Where did God come from?” The answer is God didn’t come from anywhere. God is a self-existent being. It is impossible for him not to exist, and he always has existed. His existence is permanent. So when you understand the concept of God as a self-existent being, you can see that this old question, “Where did God come from?” or “Who made God?” is a meaningless question. It is like saying, “Why is it that all bachelors are unmarried?” Nobody breaks his brain trying to figure out why all bachelors are unmarried. It belongs to the very concept of a bachelor to be unmarried.¹⁶ Similarly, it belongs to the very nature of God to exist. He cannot not exist. It is impossible for him not to exist. He had no beginning; he depends upon nothing.

Those who ask the question “Where did God come from?” or “Who made God?” simply show that they haven’t understood the concept of God. Once you understand the concept of God then you can see that this question is as trivial as asking why all triangles have three corners.

What we will do next Sunday is look at the principal challenge to the doctrine of divine aseity. This comes from the quarter of Platonism. Platonists believe that there are other uncreated entities besides God – indeed, infinities of infinities of such entities – and that therefore God is not the source of the being of all things other than himself. There are uncreated entities in addition to God. Next week we will look at that challenge, and I will try to provide some answer to it.¹⁷

16 45:00

17 Total Running Time: 46:23 (Copyright © 2015 William Lane Craig)

Lecture 3: The Problem of Platonism

We are studying the attributes of God. The first of God's infinite attributes that we've turned to examine is God's aseity or self-existence. We saw last time that a robust understanding of this attribute implies not simply that God exists independently of everything else (which would in itself be remarkable), but even more fundamentally that God exists by a necessity of his own nature. So if it is even possible that God exists then it follows that God necessarily exists. Therefore, God's aseity entails, or implies, two further divine attributes, namely God's eternality (that God is permanent; he never came into being and will never go out of being), and, second, God's necessity (that he is a being whose non-existence is impossible; a necessary being.)

In contemporary philosophy, this is usually expressed by saying that God exists in all possible worlds. But that seemed to be a problematic concept to some in the class last week. It shouldn't be. This is meant to be simply a heuristic device, not a piece of serious ontology. Thinking of possible worlds is simply a way of saying that if something is possible then that means there is a possible world in which that thing exists. If something is necessary then it exists in all possible worlds.

But I've been reading a book lately by the philosopher Bob Hale entitled *Necessary Beings*. Hale is a secular philosopher; very brilliant. This is a study of necessity and necessary beings. The way Hale explicates necessity can perhaps be helpful to those who don't find the talk of possible worlds helpful. Hale says that something is absolutely necessary if it would be the case no matter what else were the case. No matter what else might be the case, if something would still be the case then that thing is absolutely necessary. So he says you can fill in this schema: "If *blank* were the case then *blank*." You can fill in what you think to be a necessary truth. For example, "If *blank* were the case then $2+2=4$." If $2+2$ would equal 4, no matter what you put in this blank then $2+2=4$ is absolutely necessary.

What I am suggesting is that the proposition "God exists" fills this blank. No matter what you put in the other blank, this statement would still be true. If it were the case that the world did not exist then God exists. If it were the case that there were no people then it would be the case that God exists. The proposition that God exists is absolutely necessary in the sense that no matter what else might be the case it would be the case that God exists. This is the notion of God as a necessary being.

This notion of God as a self-existent being and the source of all reality outside of himself faces a very significant challenge from a philosophy called Platonism. Platonism holds that there are objects that are equally uncreated and eternal and necessary. So God is not the sole ultimate reality. In fact, he is just one of an infinite number of uncreated, eternal,

necessary beings. The paradigm example of the objects that Platonists are talking about would be mathematical entities or mathematical objects like numbers and sets and functions and so forth. The sort of things that mathematicians talk about.

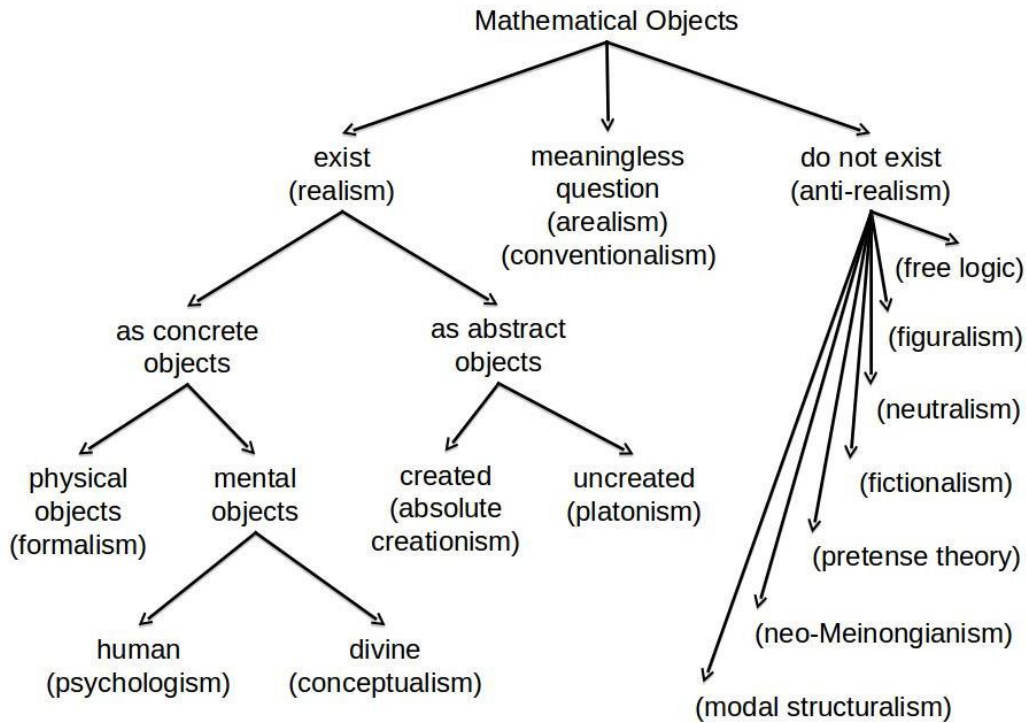
This raises the very interesting question: do numbers really exist?¹⁸ What do you think? Do you think that numbers really exist? Let's be sure that we understand the question. We all recognize that numerals exist. For example, this is the numeral two: "2." But there are many different kinds of numerals. For example, here is the Roman numeral for two: "II." They both represent the same quantity. So we are not asking: *are there numerals?* Obviously, there are numerals. We are asking: *do numbers themselves exist?* I remember coming up from my office when I first began to study this and asking Jan, "What do you think, honey? Do you think the number 2 exists?" We would discuss it over lunch as to whether or not there was such a thing such as the number 2.

Platonists say yes. In addition to these numerals, or these marks on the whiteboard, there is such a thing as the number 2. So if I have two apples on the table, not only are there the two apples, but there is also the number 2. So there is really three things. Well, there are actually an infinite number of things because there is 1, and 1+1, and 2+1, and so forth. But you get the idea. There is not just concrete objects like chairs and apples and people and planets. There are these abstract objects like numbers. These objects are thought by the Platonist to exist just as robustly as concrete objects. Numbers on this view are just like automobiles, only eternal, necessary, and uncreated. But they exist just as robustly as automobiles do.

So the question is: do these sorts of objects really exist? If they do, they would typically be thought to be uncreated, eternal, necessary things and not things that are created by God. So this would compromise God's role as the sole ultimate reality. It would not be true, as John 1:3 says, that through him all things came into being and that God is the source of all being.

Let's take a look at a PowerPoint of alternatives discussing this subject. Don't be overwhelmed by this PowerPoint. We will pick it apart piece by piece so that you can appreciate what it says.

Notice we are taking mathematical objects as our point of departure. We could have picked other kinds of abstract objects like propositions, possible worlds, properties, and so forth. But mathematical objects supply the clearest example of what we are talking about – things like numbers. Notice there are three positions with respect to the existence of numbers. There is *realism* which says that these things exist; there really are such things. On the other hand, there is *anti-realism* which denies that these things actually



exist. Then in the middle is *arealism* which says this is a meaningless question. There just is no fact of the matter about whether they exist or they don't exist. This is just meaningless. There are some arealists today.

Taking arealism first. An example of an arealist position would be so-called Conventionalism. This was a philosophy that was popular during the 1930s and 40s. It was based upon the verification principle of meaning. According to that principle, any statement that could not be verified through the five senses was a meaningless statement. It is a sort of scientism that attempts to dismiss vast tracts of human languages as cognitively empty because these statements can't be empirically verified. Sentences like ethical statements or mathematical statements can't be empirically verified. These are about abstract objects if they are about something at all. Therefore these sorts of metaphysical questions were regarded as meaningless. It is just a convention that we adopt in order to make science work and get along in society, but there isn't really any truth or falsity about whether or not the number 2 exists. It is just a convention which is arbitrarily adopted or rejected. That philosophy was prevalent during the mid-20th century.¹⁹ I have to say with the demise of the verification principle this is not as widespread today because that principle of meaning is both too far-reaching (it would dismiss vast reaches of human discourse and language as meaningless), and it also tends to be self-defeating and self-refuting. But there are some arealists who are around today.

Let's take on the other hand the view of realism. Realism with respect to mathematical objects can be of two types. First, realism could hold that these are abstract objects as a Platonist believes, or there are realists who think that mathematical objects are, in fact, concrete objects.

Let's take the abstract alternative first – that these are abstract objects. They could be regarded as uncreated. That is the Platonist view. This is the classical Platonist perspective that there are numbers, they are abstract objects, and they are uncreated. That is Platonism. On the contemporary scene, some Christian philosophers have attempted to solve the problem posed to divine aseity by the existence of numbers by adopting a sort of modified Platonism according to which numbers exist all right as abstract objects but these, too, are created by God. He has not only created all of the concrete objects in the world, but God has created all of the numbers. This will force you to modify your view of creation somewhat because in this case these numbers exist eternally and necessarily. So that means that God has been creating from eternity and that there is no possible world in which God alone exists. Creation becomes necessary on this view. That, I think, should give us theological pause. It does require you to modify in some significant ways your view of creation. But there are some Christian philosophers today who would defend Absolute Creationism.

One of the most serious objections to Absolute Creationism is called the bootstrapping objection. That is to say that it involves a vicious circularity. The easiest way to see this is by considering properties. The Platonist thinks that properties are also abstract objects like numbers, and that these exist necessarily and eternally. So consider God on Absolute Creationism having to create properties. Suppose he wants to create the property "being powerful." He would already have to be powerful in order to create the property of being powerful. So he would already have to have the property in order to create it, which is viciously circular. That is called the bootstrapping objection because it is sort of trying to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. In order to create the property of being powerful God would already have to have the property of being powerful. You could run a similar paradox with numbers. In order for God to create the number 1, 1 is the number of gods that there would need to be. There would need to be one God in order for God to create the number 1. So, again, you have a kind of vicious circularity or bootstrapping problem. This has caused many contemporary Christian philosophers to have serious reservations about Absolute Creationism. This is not an alternative that has been widely defended today. I think it is largely because of this bootstrapping objection that tends to afflict Absolute Creationism.

START DISCUSSION

Student: My question is very simple. How can the number 2 exist independent of a finite universe? It would be meaningless.

Dr. Craig: That is what a Conventionalist says, right?²⁰ That is adopting arealism. It is meaningless. But I don't think that that is difficult. Why would there need to be spatio-temporal objects in order for the number 2 to exist? Even if there were no universe, wouldn't it still be true that $2+1=3$? Even more basically, what about this: that $1=1$ or $1>0$. Surely these sorts of elementary truths of arithmetic are true whether or not anything physical exists.

Student: It would seem to me that what you are doing is coming up with a language to define an infinite universe.

Dr. Craig: That depends on what you mean by "the universe." For the Absolute Creationist, he does think that these numbers and properties and things are part of creation. So he would say there are sort of two divisions in creation. There is the concrete objects which include things like material objects, souls, angels. These are all part of the concrete world. But then he would say there is another division of creation that we don't usually talk about, and that would be this abstract realm of numbers and properties and possible worlds and propositions. So if you use the word "universe" very broadly to include everything that is created, yes, this view would say that there is necessarily eternally a created "universe" of abstract objects. If you don't use it in that broad sense and you restrict the universe to the realm of spatio-temporal objects then, no, the Platonist would say that these abstract entities exist independently of concrete things. They exist *a se*. They are like God in that respect.

Student: The number 2 only has significance as it corresponds to temporal objects. The concept – the abstraction – of the number 2 or 1 or $1>0$ has no meaning apart from a correspondence to physical objects. That is where I see the problem with this. They derive from a number of physical objects.

Dr. Craig: So on your view, in a world in which God didn't create any physical objects, wouldn't there still be three members of the Trinity?

Student: Certainly. But that is part of self-defining who God is. We ascribe a value of 3 to the Trinity because we can observe a concept of threeness or twoness or whatever. But it doesn't have any value if there is no entity.

Dr. Craig: In this case, there is an entity. There is God. There is one God. And there are three members of the Trinity. So you've already got arithmetic going right there even in the absence of any physical objects because you've got three and you've got one and then you've got arithmetic operations like $3+1$.

Student: But these are abstractions and beings that are tying a value to this in time and space. If you have a being that is not tied to time and space this is meaningless.

Dr. Craig: I'll just say again one more time, if God is timeless, wouldn't there still be one God? Wouldn't there still be three persons in the Trinity? It seems to me that these arithmetic truths don't have anything to do with temporality or time.

Student: It is true, but we ascribe the value of oneness and threeness. It is for us that are tied to time and space. This is why we have mathematics to use in the real world. It corresponds to things that happen in the real world. It is an expression of science.

Dr. Craig: You do sound sort of like a Conventionalist, I have to say. You are sort of saying there is no objective mind-independent truth about the number of persons in the Trinity. This is just something we use. I am trying to think where on this chart do you fit? Where would he go? *[laughter]*

Student: I was confused when you were talking about apples. If you had three apples and then you have the number 3 apples. But then you said there was a fourth thing which is this value that you have. What exactly? Then you said you have that value but then you have more values, an infinite number of values. What did you mean by that?²¹

Dr. Craig: I was referring to the numbers. If you have three apples on the table, are there only three things there? Well, the Platonist would say no because he would say there is also the number 3 which is the number of the apples. So there are three apples and there is another thing – the number 3. Then, as I said, once you get the number 3 you get all the other numbers as well. You get an infinitude of numbers just in virtue of there being some objects. The difficulty here is maybe grasping what the Platonist believes. Remember the Platonist thinks that these are real. That these numbers really exist. These are metaphysical realities that are just as real as people and planets and electrons and so forth.

Student: It does seem like numbers are a way of describing reality to me, initially. If you took away one apple then you have one apple, two apples, then the number two. What if you took away all the apples? Does the number 0 still exist there in its place?

Dr. Craig: Well, I think that the Platonist would say so. He would say 0 is the number of apples on the table. That gets into a real interesting question.

Student: I am wondering how you would handle Quine's objection that mathematics is at least quasi-empirical. He believed that in a world where if you had an apple in the one hand, an apple in the other hand, and put them together, a third apple appears. In that

world, $1+1=3$. There is at least some empirical element of mathematics, so it is not metaphysically necessary.

Dr. Craig: I don't think that is his view myself. Quine, who was a naturalist philosopher, felt forced to adopt Platonism about sets at least. So this naturalist believed that there are these abstract entities because they are referred to in our scientific theories. In our scientific theories we have reference to things like numbers and functions and so forth. So they must actually exist. He was a Conventionalist about necessity. Maybe that is what you are thinking of.

Student: Maybe. I've read that he believed mathematics to be at least somewhat empirical. There were at least some empirical elements that grounded . . .

Dr. Craig: The only thing I can think of that would connect in that way would be that he didn't think that necessity and possibility were objective. These were just conventions, as I described a moment ago.

Student: Do you have a response to the Formalist who says mathematics isn't metaphysically necessary; it is grounded in physical reality.

Dr. Craig: That is later on in the chart as you will see. Let's put that aside.

Student: Backing up one step, is it really critical that God is the only uncreated and necessary being? You mentioned John 1:3. And it does seem like it is a problem there when it says, "All things came into being through him." But then it qualifies and says, "Apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being."

Dr. Craig: Right. The second clause of John 1:3 is weaker than the first clause. The first clause is a universal statement: "All things came into being through him." You are quite right. If you punctuate the text the way you read it then it would be followed by a weaker clause that isn't the same as the first clause. There it simply says, "Not one thing that has come into being came into being without him." One of the interesting things is that the punctuation of that verse is very uncertain. Many scholars think that the punctuation should be "All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being." Then the next verse starts, "What has come into being through him is life and the life . . ." So the question of the punctuation of this verse actually even comes into play. If you look in your Greek New Testament they will have a footnote about the uncertainty of how to punctuate the verse which is amazing because the punctuation isn't in the original Greek.²² Why are they having a footnote about how English translators punctuate this sentence when it has absolutely nothing to do with the Greek text? I've asked some Greek scholars about that, and they said this is really extraordinary that they would have this sort of comment. I think you can show many other passages that we did

review last week where it says, “For from him, and to him, and through him, are all things.” So John 1:3 is just a piece, I think, of a broader textual testimony to God’s being the unique uncreated being.

But you are certainly correct in saying some Christian philosophers are just willing to bite the bullet and say, yeah, there are things that are uncreated by God and co-eternal with him, and necessary, and independent of him. They just don’t see any problem with it. I have difficulty understanding how such a view could be reconciled with the Jewish concept of God which seems to me to be clearly that God is the source of everything outside of himself. God is not to be praised and worshiped because he has created this little small part of reality, namely the concrete realm, but he is to be praised and worshiped because he is the creator of everything that exists other than himself. That certainly is something that is part of the debate. Some philosophers would respond by just biting the bullet and saying, yeah, there are things independent of God and co-necessary, and co-eternal. But I am not willing to go that route myself.

END DISCUSSION

You see next to abstract objects there is a kind of realism that says that these things exist as concrete objects. These could be two types of concrete objects. They could either be physical objects or they could be mental objects. That is to say, thoughts in somebody’s mind.

Physical objects. One view or alternative that takes this view would be Formalism which says that mathematics is basically scratch marks on paper. There is no significance beyond that. Mathematical entities just are these marks on paper which are manipulated by mathematicians in accordance with certain rules, and that is all there is to it. There is not many people that find that point of view persuasive today because it certainly seems that the number 2 isn’t to be identified with the mark on your piece of paper or the mark on my piece of paper. When we say $2+2=4$ we are talking about a general truth, not some specific mark that has been made on a piece of paper. It is difficult to see how this view would be consistent with the necessity of mathematical truth.

There is the alternative of taking them as mental objects – thoughts in somebody’s mind. This might either be a human mind or God’s mind. The view that mathematical objects are just thoughts in people’s minds is called Psychologism. This would say you have ideas of the number 2 or of $2+2=4$ and that is what these mathematical objects are. They are just ideas in people’s minds. That view, again, is not very widely adopted today because, again, of the inner-subjectivity of mathematics. If Kevin has the idea of $2+2$ and $2+2$ is an idea in Kevin’s mind, then what is Stephanie thinking of when she thinks $2+2$? The idea or thought that is in Kevin’s mind isn’t in her mind. Different people have different thoughts. So how could these mathematical objects just be your thoughts?

Moreover, there are infinite numbers of mathematical objects and infinite mathematical truths. There aren't enough people to have all those thoughts. So you can't ground them in human minds. Moreover, human beings aren't necessary. They only have existed for a period of time on this planet. Are we to think then that these mathematical objects haven't always existed or that it hasn't always been true that $2+2=4$? These are the sorts of problems that attend Psychologism that has made it unpopular today.²³

More Christian philosophers have chosen to adopt Divine Conceptualism. This is historically the mainstream Christian position from Origen and St. Augustine, through Thomas Aquinas, through William Ockham, on into the Late Middle Ages. The standard Christian view has been that what Plato thought were these abstract entities are really thoughts in the mind of God. So the church fathers moved the realm of Platonic ideas into the mind of God and made them God's thoughts. This is immune to the sort of objections that Psychologism falls prey to because in this case, for example, the number 2 is uniquely that object that God is thinking when he thinks 2. That is the number 2. Because God is eternal and necessary, he can be the ground of necessary mathematical truths. Because he is infinite and omniscient he can ground an infinite number of mathematical truths and have an infinite number of mathematical objects as objects of his thought.

So Divine Conceptualism is an alternative that finds quite a few defenders on the contemporary scene. In this way one would avoid having entities outside God as it were – entities apart from God which would be numbers and other mathematical objects. They don't really exist. What really exists will be God and his thoughts.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Can we simply see numbers as adjectives? So adjectives can come in two ways. Man sees nouns and describes them with adjectives. But God actually has this conceptualism – the adjective in him – then he creates nouns. So it is a different perspective.

Dr. Craig: All right. I am simplifying. I am skating over the surface here. This question that you just asked is very penetrating. So it requires me to say a little bit more. You are quite right. The adjectival use of numbers isn't committing to objects. So if I say, "There are 3 members of the Trinity" that doesn't commit you to the number 3. In order to commit you to numbers you have to use the word as a noun, as you said. "3 is the number of the members of the Trinity." Or if I say "3 men enter the tavern" there is no commitment there to the number 3. It is just an adjective. But if I say "3 is the number of men who entered the tavern" then I have committed myself to the reality of the number 3 because I used it as a substantive; as a noun that refers to some object out there. The

difficulty is that those two sentences seem to be synonymous, right? The number of men who entered the tavern is 3 – 3 men entered the tavern. Does that sentence convey the metaphysical commitments that the Platonist thinks, or that the anti-realist thinks? This gets into a huge debate over whether or not we can reduce all of our commitments by expressing them adjectivally. I would say that there is a pretty general consensus that that cannot be done. Do you see anti-realism on the chart? One of the strategies for anti-realism – it is not on this one – one of the alternatives that is not listed would be what we could call Paraphrastic strategies where you would paraphrase away your commitment to numbers by using adjectives instead of nouns.²⁴ I think, as I said, it is fairly widely acknowledged that a Paraphrastic strategy is going to face huge obstacles. So many Platonists would say this isn't going to avoid the problem. But there are others who have offered these kinds of strategies. I can think of a couple. For example, there is a philosopher at Berkeley called Charles Chihara. There is another philosopher named Jeffery Hellman. Both of them have offered what are essentially ways of paraphrasing arithmetic and numbers so that you get rid of them and you aren't committed to them. So, yes, your question is very good and would represent one of the anti-realist alternatives.

END DISCUSSION

With that we need to draw it to a close.

*[Closing prayer]*²⁵

24 35:03

25 Total Running Time: 36:28 (Copyright © 2015 William Lane Craig)

Lecture 4: Anti-Realist Theories / Practical Application

In our lesson we have been talking about God's attributes, and in particular his attribute of aseity or self-existence. We saw that the most serious challenge posed to God's unique incommunicable attribute of aseity is Platonism, which is the view that there exists other uncreated, necessary, eternal objects besides God – things like mathematical objects, numbers, sets, functions, and so forth. Last week we began to review responses to the challenge of Platonism. *[Dr. Craig makes reference to the diagram from last week – see previous transcript for that diagram]* We have discussed, first of all, the realist alternatives to Platonism, which would take mathematical objects either to be abstract ideas that are created by God or else as concrete objects, namely thoughts in human minds or else, more plausibly, thoughts in the mind of God. These are all realist solutions to the problem posed by Platonism because these solutions agree with the Platonist that, in fact, mathematical objects exist – there really are such things.

But in addition to these realist solutions, you'll see on the right hand side of the diagram a range of anti-realist solutions to the challenge of Platonism. These are united in denying that there are any such things as mathematical objects. Mathematical objects simply do not exist. There are no such things. These anti-realist solutions immediately remove the challenge posed by the existence of abstract objects to God's being the sole ultimate reality because on anti-realism there just aren't any such objects, and therefore God is the only uncreated, self-existent, necessary, eternal being.

Let's just review briefly some of these anti-realist solutions. For example, Free Logic is a type of logic that has only been developed since about the 1970s. It is a very recent development in the study of logic. According to Free Logic we can use terms to refer to things even though those things do not exist. For example, I can refer to the hole in your shoe. Your shoe exists, but it is not as though in addition to the shoe there is something else, namely, the hole in your shoe. The hole isn't a thing. It is not an object that exists. What you simply have is a shoe that is shaped in a certain way, but the hole isn't something different. Or if I say, "There is a lack of compassion in the world." I am not committing myself to things called "lacks." There aren't things out there in the world – objects - "lacks" when I say there is a lack of compassion in the world. Or if I say "Wednesday is the day of the faculty meeting" I am saying something true but I am not committing myself to the reality of Wednesdays. I am not saying that Wednesdays are objects that actually exist. Or if I say, "The pilot's quick thinking averted the terrible accident on the Hudson river." The accident never happened but I can still refer to it in a true sentence. So Free Logic is a logic that enables you to talk about and refer to things even though those things don't exist. What the Free Logician can say is that mathematics

sentences, like $2+2=4$, are true even though the terms in those sentences don't actually refer to anything. There is no such thing as $2+2$ or 4 anymore than there is such a thing as the hole in your shirt or a lack or a Wednesday. That is the alternative of Free Logic.

Figuralism (the next on the list) is a different form of anti-realism. Figuralism points out that much of our language, a great deal of ordinary language, is figurative in nature.²⁶ It's metaphorical in nature. If I say, "It is raining cats and dogs outside," I've said something that is true but it doesn't mean there are animals falling from the sky. This is a figure of speech for saying that it is raining hard outside. So it would be inept to take that statement literally. It is figuratively true that it is raining cats and dogs outside. Or if somebody is angry, I might say, "She has a bee in her bonnet." That is true, but not in a literal way. That is a figure of speech. Similarly, the Figuralist will say that mathematical discourse is very plausibly interpreted as a sort of metaphorical or figurative discourse. It isn't meant to be taken literally as referring to things like numbers. These are what one philosopher calls existential metaphors. They are figurative ways of speaking of things but there really aren't such things in a literal sense. That would be Figuralism.

Neutralism is yet a third form of anti-realism. Neutralism agrees with Free Logic that we can use terms to refer to things that don't exist. When we refer to things our statements are just neutral with respect to whether those things exist. So if I say, "The weather in Atlanta today is balmy" I am not committing myself to an object called "the weather" as though "the weather" is something that exists. Or if I say, "The view of the Jezreel Valley from atop Mount Carmel was gorgeous" I am not committing myself to an object "the view" of the Jezreel Valley. It is not as though there is an object that is in the world called "the view of the Jezreel Valley." Or if I say, "The price of the tickets was ten dollars" I am not committing myself to the reality of objects called "prices." In many, many different ways we use terms in ordinary language to talk about things without committing ourselves to the reality of those things.

Certainly sometimes we do mean to speak in a metaphysically committing way. If I say, "This table is made out of wood laminate," there I am pretty clearly committing myself to the reality of the table. What will tip us off to whether or not a person is thinking that there is a real object will usually be personal effects – rhetorical statements maybe emphasizing like "it *really* does exist" or the context. But the Neutralist will agree with the Free Logician that we often use terms to talk about things without thinking there are objects that correspond to those. So he would agree with respect to mathematical objects that, when we say statements like $3 \times 3 = 9$, those terms are just neutral as to whether or not you are committed to the reality of mathematical objects.

The Neutralist goes farther, however, than the Free Logician because the Free Logician thinks that if you say “there is” something then you are committing yourself to the reality of that thing. The Neutralist would say that even expressions like “there is” are ontologically neutral. I can say, for example, “There are deep differences between Republicans and Democrats” without thinking that I’ve committed myself to objects in the world called “differences” and that some are “deep.” The expression “there is” and “there are” in English are very light in their ontological commitments. It will be, again, personal factors such as context, inflection of your voice, saying “there *really is* an abstract object” that will tip you off as to whether or not you mean to make an ontological commitment. So the Neutralist goes even further than the Free Logician. The Neutralist will say that really there isn’t anything in language that in virtue of its meaning commits you to saying there really are those objects that either correspond to the terms you use or are the things you say “there is” or “there are.”

Neutralism is a view, I’ll just say personally, to which I am very attracted.²⁷ It seems to me that this gives a very plausible account of ordinary language. When applied to mathematical discourse, it allows you to affirm the truth of mathematics but to simply say it is neutral in terms of its commitments to objects.

Fictionalism is a quite different form of anti-realism. The Fictionalist, like the Platonist, agrees that if you use terms to refer to something, or if you say “there is” or “there are” something, then you are committed to the reality of the things that you say “there are” or that you refer to. So the Fictionalist accepts those criteria for ontological commitment that the Neutralist and the Free Logician reject. But why is the Fictionalist then not a Platonist? Because Fictionalists think that those statements referring to or saying that “there is” or “there are” certain things are false. They are fictional. They are not true. So the Fictionalist will take the radical line that it is not true that $2+2=4$. It is not true that 3 is greater than 1. It is not true that there is a prime number between 2 and 4. If you say that is crazy – those seem to be obvious truths, even necessary truths – the Fictionalist will remind you that on his view to say $2+2=4$ is to make a radical metaphysical statement that there is an abstract object named “ $2+2$ ” and there is an abstract object named “4” and that those two objects are the same object. And that is not at all obvious. So the Fictionalist will say if you accept these criteria for how we make ontological commitments then it is far from obvious that statements of elementary arithmetic are true. That actually turn out to be radical metaphysical assertions that we have no reason to think are true.

The Fictionalist will say these statements are true within the story of mathematics; within standard arithmetic they are true. In this sense they are like statements of fiction. It is not

true that Sherlock Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street. There is no such place. There was no such person. But in the Arthur Conan Doyle stories, it is true that Sherlock Holmes lived at 221B Baker Street. So the Fictionalist will say statements of mathematics are true in the story of mathematics in the same way that some of these statements are true in the Conan Doyle stories of Sherlock Holmes. But other statements will be false. It is not true, for example, that Sherlock Holmes met Henri Fauveau in those stories. That would not be true in the story of Sherlock Holmes. Neither is it true in the story of standard mathematics that $2+3=4$. That is Fictionalism.

Pretense Theory is another anti-realism that takes inspiration from theories of fiction. They work largely off of the brilliant pioneering work of a philosopher at the University of Michigan named Kendall Walton. Walton's work on fiction holds that fiction is an extension of children's games of make-believe. Walton notes that children invest enormous amounts of time and energy in games of make-believe. He says it would be very surprising if, when people reach adulthood, they just give this up all of a sudden and no longer make-believe. Walton says, in fact, we don't give it up. This is what fiction and drama and film and literature and art is all about. These are, in effect, adult games of make-believe. He says what is crucial to fiction is not that the statements are false. A novel about the future like George Orwell's *1984* could turn out to be true. It could all turn out to be true, but it is still fiction. Or the story of *Hamlet* might be true on some other planet somewhere in another galaxy in the universe for all we know, but *Hamlet* is still fiction. It is not the falsity of the story that makes something fictional. Rather, in Walton's analysis, what makes something fictional is that it is prescribed to be imagined as true. We are to imagine that there is a Danish prince named Hamlet and that he did such-and-such.²⁸ Or we are to imagine that there was a detective living in London who had a colleague named John Watson who did tremendous exploits. Then within this fictional world of imagination the story can be unfolded. So what is essential to fiction, in Walton's view, is this act of making believe or imagining something to be true. The statements are prescribed to be imagined as true. They may or may not actually be true. But in either case what is essential to fiction is the prescription to be imagined as true.

Apply this to mathematics. In mathematics, we are, in a sense, prescribed to imagine the axioms to be true. You are prescribed to imagine the elementary arithmetic axioms to be true. Then you can derive all of your theorems. Or you imagine the axioms of set theory to be true. Then the mathematician can derive all of his theorems. So the whole thing is a sort of species of make-believe. Far from being a crazy view of mathematics, this is a view of mathematics that many mathematicians themselves actually entertain. They would say that the mathematical axioms are postulates which you postulate and then you derive your deductions from them. But you are quite free as a mathematician to adopt a

different set of postulates, a different set of axioms, and to explore that. So there is a wide variety of set theories that are on offer today. There is not simply a single set theory in mathematics. There is a range of set theories. These have different ontological commitments. Some commit you to sets. Some commit you to a different sort of objects called classes which are different from sets. So Pretense Theory will say that because you are merely pretending or imagining these things to be true, you are not committing yourself to the reality of these objects anymore than you are committing yourself to the reality of Sherlock Holmes in imagining that this fictional world is the case.

Neo-Meinongianism is one of the wildest anti-realisms. This stems from an Austrian philosopher Alexius Meinong who lived at the end of the 19th and into the early 20th century. Meinong was concerned to develop a theory of objects. He called his philosophy “Object Theory” – in German, *Gegenstande Theorie*. What Meinong maintained is that there are objects that do not exist. He says although it may sound paradoxical, there are things of which it is true that there are no such things. Unicorns. Centaurs. Fairies. The accident that was prevented. Holes. There are things which do not exist, Meinong would say. He develops this whole theory about these objects. On this view the Neo-Meinongian (that is to say, the modern follower of Meinong of which there are several in the world today) would say that mathematical objects are objects that do not exist. That would be one form of anti-realism.

Another one would be Modal Structuralism. This is a view that has been defended by Geoffrey Hellman, who is a philosopher of mathematics. On this view, mathematics is about structures. Without going into great detail, the idea here is that numbers are positions in structures. So the third position in a structure would be 3, the fourth position would be 4, and so forth. There aren't objects called numbers. They are just positions in a sort of abstract structure. Some Structuralists in mathematics think that structures exist. This would be a kind of abstract object. A Platonist would say there are not numbers but there are structures. But the Modal Structuralist will say there could have been such structures. What he would say is that if there were numbers then $2+2$ would equal 4^{29} . Or if there were numbers the square root of 9 would be 3. So you can see he reinterprets mathematics in such a way that it doesn't commit you to the reality of the objects that appear in those statements. These are simply paraphrased in such a way as to say that it is possible that there are such things, and if there were then they would have these properties. So Modal Structuralism is what I referred to last week. It is a kind of Paraphrastic strategy. That is to say you offer paraphrases of mathematical sentences that don't involve you in commitments to these abstract objects.

Those are just some of the anti-realisms that are on offer today. There is a real potpourri of alternatives. There are others that aren't even on this list. I want to just share these with you to give you an idea of the field of options that is open. Obviously, in this class, we haven't and aren't going to discuss any of these in detail, but I simply want to familiarize you with the range of options today lest someone think that the reality of mathematical objects poses an insuperable challenge to divine self-existence and aseity – to the idea that God is the sole ultimate reality. That is not, in fact, true. As you can see, there are a great number of options available to the Christian theist today which would not commit you to the reality of uncreated objects of any sort. Platonism is only one view – a tiny view – in the whole range of views about the reality of these objects. I think that these other views, many of them, are very plausible. In my book that I am going to be publishing on this, I'll be defending a number of these views as plausible alternatives to Platonism. In order for Platonism to be a defeater so to speak of God's unique self-existence, he would have to prove that Platonism is true and that all of these alternatives are false. I don't think anybody believes there is a realistic prospect of doing that.

START DISCUSSION

Student: A lot of these theories remind me a lot of the transcendental argument which I've kind of struggled with. The transcendental argument is essentially, as I understand it, an argument for the spiritual existence. It is saying you couldn't have objects such as Love or Justice and explain that with a naturalistic view. It seems a lot of these theories would be defeaters to the transcendental argument which I find is an attractive argument yet I do not know if I can hold it. I was wondering what your thought was.

Dr. Craig: I've never heard what you just described called the transcendental argument. As I've heard that expression used, it usually means that in order to affirm rationality and logical thinking, there needs to be some ground of this in God rather than in the evolutionary process because the evolutionary process doesn't aim at truth. It merely aims at survival. We could survive without having true beliefs. As long as those beliefs are conducive to survival, truth doesn't need to come into the equation. On naturalism, the argument is that we have a defeater for thinking that our cognitive faculties are reliable. That is the way I hear and understand the transcendental argument. What you seem to be saying is that in order for there to be objects referred to by these abstract terms you need to have God maybe as the ground for those. I think that the Divine Conceptualist might well run an argument like that because he thinks these are thoughts in the mind of God. So I could see someone saying $2+2=4$ requires the existence of numbers in order to be true. But what are numbers? Well, they must be thoughts in the mind of God, so this is an argument for God's existence.³⁰ I would agree with what you

said that anti-realism would undercut that argument. I don't use that argument. I don't think it is a good argument because I agree with the Neutralist on this. I don't see any reason to think that the truth of $2+2=4$ commits you to the reality of $2+2$ or 4 . I usually hear that called the conceptualist argument for God's existence. I do think that the person who wants to run that argument is going to have to defeat that whole right hand side of the diagram. I think that would be really tough to do.

Student: What you are saying by the diagram is that the left side is referring to mathematical objects being mentally true but not metaphysically actual. Is that what you are saying?

Dr. Craig: The left hand side? No.

Student: The right side is defeating the left side in that sense?

Dr. Craig: The right side are the anti-realist views. These realist views think that there *are* mathematical objects. There *are* numbers, and they are either abstract (like the Platonist thinks) or they are concrete (either physical or mental). So the realist views think that there really are numbers.

Student: Oh. Yeah, that's not right.

Dr. Craig: I don't think so, but we are leaving that open because there are forms of realism like Absolute Creationism or Divine Conceptualism which are consistent with saying God is the only uncreated self-existent being and these other things are dependent upon God.

Student: And that wouldn't be the same as saying there are such things as moral perfections like Good or Justice or things like that. How do we then come up with an argument to say that these things are real but they are way more real than numbers can be?

Dr. Craig: What you point out here is, whereas I've taken mathematical objects as my point of departure, you could put in other things like that. For example, moral values. Here, I would be a realist. I think that there are moral values. But I would not be a Platonist. I don't think that there is such a thing as Justice or Rapacity or Greed as some sort of strange abstract object. I would say they are anchored in God who is a concrete object. This would fit very well with the view of God as the concrete paradigm and foundation of objective moral value.

Student: Would it be possible for the anti-realist ideas to backfire? Someone, for instance, asks if you believe that God is an uncreated object. On anti-realism, how can you say there is a God?

Dr. Craig: How do you think I would answer that question?

Student: Because God is uncreated or because God . . . I don't know! That's why I am asking.

Dr. Craig: I would run cosmological, teleological, moral, ontological arguments for God's existence.

Student: Which you don't have for numbers?

Dr. Craig: We've got arguments. We've got reasons to think that God is real. We are not just postulating God's existence on the basis of language – that there are sentences like “God is good” or something like that, and therefore the term “God” must refer to an object, therefore God must exist. I agree that that kind of argument, I don't think, works – to use this kind of linguistic argument. But I think you've got to have a cause of the origin of the universe, for example. That is not a linguistic argument.

Student: You are saying the right hand side can defeat God, so what keeps the Divine Conceptualist from saying Modal Structuralism is just one point God accepts us and then creates this reality?

Dr. Craig: That is what the Conceptualist would say. These views are, to a certain extent, incompatible with each other. The anti-realist says there are no mathematical objects. The Divine Conceptualist says yes there are, and they are thoughts in the mind of God. He would say God has the thought of these structures, and these structures are ideas in God's mind. That would be a realist view of Structuralism. You can be a Structuralist and be a realist or you can be an anti-realist.³¹ Either option is available to you. I've not tried to decide in our class here which of these options is correct. That would be far too ambitious a project. But just to let you know there are lots of different options on the table today. It would be very difficult to rule them out in such a way that Platonism is the only alternative left.

Student: I am struggling from all that you have. For the realist there are concrete objects or abstract objects. I understand how a physical object is concrete. How is a mental concrete object different from an abstract object?

Dr. Craig: I have to apologize somewhat for skimming the surface here because it leaves these unanswered questions. The question that you ask is a profound one. You are saying how do you differentiate between an abstract object and a concrete object. The most widespread and I think plausible answer to that question is that concrete objects are objects that have causal powers to do things. Whereas abstract objects are causally impotent. They are causally effete. The number 7 has no causal effect upon anything. But obviously a mind or thoughts in someone's mind would have causal effects, both on God's part and on our part. Thoughts would be concrete events in some person's mind

whereas mathematical objects as usually construed would be causally impotent and therefore abstract, not concrete. So concrete here doesn't mean material. It means causally efficacious or capable of having causal influence.

END DISCUSSION

What practical application does all of this have to our lives? Let me mention just two.

First of all, because God is the sole ultimate reality, God ought to be our ultimate concern in life. The theologian Paul Tillich actually defined God as the object of ultimate concern. Whatever is your object of ultimate concern is god for you. Since God is the sole ultimate reality, he is and ought to be our proper ultimate concern. To substitute anything else for God would be idolatry. If I were to ask for a show of hands in the class today, how many idolaters do we have in the class today there would probably be very few. Some have realized I think already the implications of what I am saying. If there is anything else in life that is more of concern to you than God, you are guilty of idolatry. If your ultimate concern is not knowing and serving God better then you are worshiping a lesser god. You are falling into idolatry. God's aseity and ultimate reality is a powerful reminder to us of where our ultimate concern ought to be.

Second, God's self-existence ought to exclude our selfishness. Another word for self-existence is independence. God is independent of everything else that exists. This is what man and Satan want, isn't it? Independence. They want to go their own way; to challenge God's self-existence by opposing to it their own independence. We want to oppose our selfhood to God's "I am." Selfishness, I think, can seem very natural until we reflect upon the being of God. But when we understand who God is and his self-existence then I think we can see how foolish it is, how insane it is, to oppose our selfhood to God's self-existent being and to not treat him as our ultimate concern and to submit ourselves to him. Living for God, denying self in favor of God's self-existence, I think makes good sense once we understand God's self-existent nature.³²

Lecture 5: Eternity

We've been talking about God's infinite attributes. We completed last week our study of divine aseity. Today we want to turn to a new attribute of God, namely, God's eternity. We want to look first at some scriptural data concerning God's eternity.

First of all, the Scriptures teach that God exists without beginning and end. Psalm 90:1-4:

LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.

God exists beginninglessly and endlessly.

Second, the Scriptures indicate that God's eternity contrasts with the transitoriness of man. Psalm 102:11-12 and 25-27:

My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass. But thou, O LORD, art enthroned for ever; thy name endures to all generations. . . . Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They will perish, but thou dost endure; they will all wear out like a garment. Thou changest them like raiment, and they pass away; but thou art the same, and thy years have no end.

Here you have a beautiful comparison between the eternity of God, beginningless and endless, and the creation that God has made which is temporal and transitory.

Psalm 90:5-6: "Thou dost sweep men away; they are like a dream, like grass which is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers." Here human life is compared to a dream which is evanescent in its existence. It vanishes the moment that you awake. Or the grass that in the morning is fresh and flourishing but then is burned and scorched by the evening. Similarly, our existence is so transitory in comparison with God's eternal existence.

We might compare here as well Job 36:26 which says, "Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable." Compare that with Isaiah 41:4: "Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he." Here God is the eternal one who was there at the beginning and there at the end of human history. He is the one who endures forever whereas human existence is fleeting and transitory.

Finally, in a difficult to express way, the Scriptures seem to teach that God existed before time began. Although there are a number of passages like this, let's look at just one of

them. Jude 25, the last book before the book of Revelation in the New Testament.³³ Here the author says, “To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” What an interesting expression on the author’s part. He gives glory to God before all time (before time began), now (presently), and forever into the future. This suggests that time itself had a beginning and God in some difficult-to-express way existed “before time began.”

Let’s talk about a systematic reflection upon this biblical data. The Bible teaches that God is eternal as we have seen, but it does not make it clear as to how God is eternal. What do I mean by that? There are two ways in which something can exist without a beginning and without an end. One would be to exist throughout infinite time. If we imagine time like a line which has no end but goes on forever and which has no beginning then something could be beginningless and endless by existing throughout all time, without beginning and without end. That would be one way of being eternal – to be beginningless and endless throughout infinite time.

The other way would be to exist outside of time altogether. If we say that God isn’t on the line anywhere then he doesn’t have any temporal location and doesn’t have any temporal duration. He would be beginningless and endless simply because the concepts of beginning and ending wouldn’t apply to a being who isn’t in time. A being who transcends time and who isn’t on the time line would have neither beginning nor end because he doesn’t endure through time.

As I say, the biblical data leave it an open question as to whether God is eternal in the sense of being omnitemporal throughout infinite time or simply being timeless or being atemporal. So this isn’t a question that can be decided biblically; rather, this is a philosophical theological question. This is where the biblical exegete can take you only so far, then he has to hand the task over to the philosophical theologian if we are to go any further.

The core idea of eternity that both of these concepts encapsulate would be to exist eternally is to exist without beginning or end, or to exist permanently. That is the core idea of eternity. But then there are at least two modes of existence that could fit that definition: either an omnitemporal mode throughout infinite time, or else an atemporal mode of existence. The Bible doesn’t settle that question.

START DISCUSSION

Student: When the Scripture you just quoted from Jude spoke that God existed before space-time (in other words he existed before; that is kind of stating that time began at

some time). So he could have been existing before there was such a thing as this realm of space-time and then be in it as he created it.

Dr. Craig: Yes. The difficulty is how are we going to understand this? How are we going to unpack it? Because taken at face value it would seem to be a contradiction to say that God existed before time because “before” is a temporal relationship, right?³⁴ So to exist before the beginning of time in a literal sense would be a contradiction in terms. Obviously, the Bible isn’t a philosophy book and therefore we need to try to understand what Jude is trying to say. That will involve some sort of philosophical reflection to try to make sense of it. That is what we are going to try to do.

Student: There is someone who came up with an idea which I had already agreed with – God must have his own time. Let’s simplify it and say his own time. If you define time as what takes place between non-simultaneous events then obviously there was time before space-time was created because if God has a thought and then another thought those are two non-simultaneous events. Something had to fill in between it. If you want to call it something else, OK, but it seems to me that God has to have that time even before he created the universe. You could say what about time and distance is relative and all of this. Fine. That would be another time in my concept. But before he created that, he would have had to have done that. In Jude 25 which you cited, in the NIV it says “before all ages.” Brad just checked. The Greek is *aión* – Strong’s 165. The Greek meaning of that is the same as our meaning of “epic” – like the Roaring 20s. A time that had a certain characteristic, but no perhaps definite beginning and end, but an age. Generally when Christ in the New Testament says, “Lo, I am with you even to the end of the age” that is where that is – meaning when he comes back for us. Rather than saying that verse, I don’t think that is a strong argument that God preceded time but rather that he preceded all ages or all of the things which he created in the universe.

Dr. Craig: All right. That wasn’t a comprehension question. What you have begun to do is to enter into systematic reflection upon this. I think many of your comments were very helpful. I would say, with respect to *aión*, the use of the word “ages” can mean different things in different contexts. If you look at how this is used with respect to God and time, there are a number of verses that seem to suggest that prior to the beginning of any of the ages that God existed alone and that he then create these. It may be that you’ll want to say that he existed in a time of his own that is different from the sort of physical space-time that, I think, the other questioner was talking about. We’ll hold that thought for now and come back to it.

Student: The line that represents time – does it always have a value to it? Like today, time to me means seconds and minutes. Is that what it represents? Infinite time always has a value to it?

Dr. Craig: If by value you mean that they can be intervals that can be specified in it, we are talking about this kind of time that will have metric units like days, years, seconds, and so forth. So, right, that is what we are talking about. Is that what you are asking?

Student: Yes. I am just really confused about that. Then time can't always exist because before the universe was created how was time measured then?

Dr. Craig: OK, we are getting into exactly, as I say, these systematic questions. What the last questioner wants to say is that God has a sort of time of his own and that even if this time of our universe did have a beginning, say at the Big Bang for simplicity sake, nevertheless perhaps God pre-existed the beginning of physical time in a sort of metaphysical time in which he exists. That is a question that deserves to be explored.

Student: Isn't it a little more accurate to define time not as a straight line but as a circle?

Dr. Craig: I don't think that would be right on a Christian point of view, at least, because on a Christian point of view time or history is not circular.³⁵ Quite the opposite. It has a goal, or a *telos*, which is to be reached in the Kingdom of God, the establishment of an afterlife, heaven and hell, and so forth. So there is a creation and then there is an end toward which the world is striving and moving. The Christian concept of time is linear. It is not circular. The view that time is circular would be a view that would be associated more with ancient Greek cyclical thought that everything will repeat itself over and over again – that there is no goal or destiny toward which the universe is tending, but everything just happens over and over again. But even if that were true of human history, it seems to me that what that would give you would be still something like where the events would repeat over and over again but there still would be a linear time. For time to be literally circular would mean that some event E is both before and after itself, which seems to be absurd. How could E be before itself and also after itself? If time is circular that would be the implication which seems crazy. If E has already occurred then it can't be before itself. I think the idea of cyclical or circular time is absurd really. Time (if it exists) is going to be linear even if the events in time recycle over and over again.

Student: I understand what you are saying. I guess what I am saying, and I didn't express it very well, is eternity would best be defined as a circle. It has no beginning; it has no end. No matter what point on the circle you pick you can go to the left, right, up, or down. Whereas time, if you take it as a created event, does have a beginning, does have an end, and is defined.

Dr. Craig: I have difficulty, again, with this idea of it being circular because that seems to mean that things are both before and after themselves. If you want to pick a geometry for a timeless God's existence, I think a single point would be a better geometrical representation of eternity. There is no before; there is no after; there is no earlier or later. There is just that single state. So I would say if you want to represent eternity geometrically, then rather than any sort of a line it would just be a point.

Student: I always think of time as something that we use as a surrogate for measuring change. If God is changeless then the God-time is irrelevant because there is no change. If God has a thought and another thought, he doesn't change with his thoughts. All his thoughts are simultaneous.

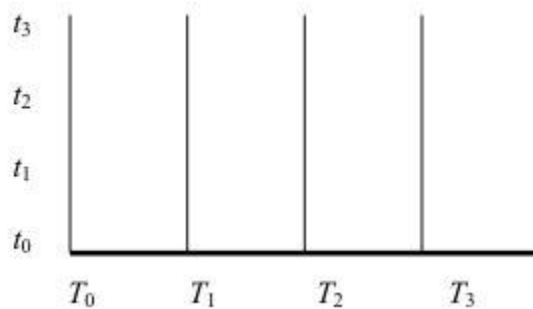
Dr. Craig: OK, see this is a very different view than Bob's. This is nice because we get here an example of where two people, both Christians, have different conceptions of divine eternity. One thinks of God as thinking in a sort of linear way one thought after another which, as Bob says, obviously sets up a before and after relation. Whereas you say, no, God doesn't think sequentially like that. All of his thoughts are in this single, in a sense, simultaneous point. That exactly illustrates these two different conceptions of eternity. Many theologians would agree with you that a changeless God is simply timeless. Others, especially more contemporary theologians would agree with Bob that God is in time and goes through a temporal sequence. As I say, this is an issue on which orthodox Christians disagree. But at least these differences are helping us, I think, to see very clearly the contrasting views.³⁶

Student: I would refer to Romans 4:17, one of my favorite verses, God calls the not-being as being or calls all things as though they are. I see God as living in the infinite now. He doesn't have a time sequence of events, but he can call all things as though they are even though they aren't.

Dr. Craig: That verse that you are referring to where it says God calls into existence the things that do not exist is probably a reference to his creation of the world from nothing. This is an expression of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* – out of nothing. I don't see that that would decide the question that we are talking about here as to whether God's existence is atemporal or temporal. Either of these views will see God as creating the universe from nothing. The universe doesn't have a material cause. God created all the matter and energy as well as everything that is made out of matter and energy, as well as the angelic realms. So I do think that this is an issue that we are not going to be able to decide biblically by quoting proof texts. This is going to be a philosophical theological question to which we will have to give arguments.

Student: Is there an alternative view here? You said God is outside of time or he is in a temporal time that says God is at every point in our temporal time at the same time. Ultimately, he is in our temporal time but he is at the same point because he can see the past, present, and future.

Dr. Craig: It is very hard to make sense of what you just said because you said God is at every time at the same time. Well, now, which time is that? Is it at 3 o'clock that he is at every time? That wouldn't make sense. How could he be at every time if he is at that time? I think the only way to make sense of what you said would be if we had two dimensions of time or a kind of hypertime. [*draws a diagram on the whiteboard illustrating hypertime*]



You can imagine there is another time dimension. What you could say is at every moment of hypertime, God exists at every moment of our time. That would avoid the contradiction. You are saying that God exists at every moment of time at the same moment of time. But you are talking about two different times. You are talking about ordinary time and hypertime. The difficulty, I think, in that is not only is it sort of extravagant in postulating these hypertime dimensions for which we have no evidence (there is no reason to think these hypertimes exist), but in a sense it only kicks the problem upstairs because now you have a God in hypertime who is just existing at one moment of hypertime after another. So it is the same problem all over again.

Student: Another way to say it is: is he omnitemporal?

Dr. Craig: To be omnitemporal is just to be everlasting throughout infinite time. That is one of the views. That is one of the two views we are talking about.

Student: Which one of those views would that be then?

Dr. Craig: That would be the view where I originally drew a line and said God exists at every point on the time line. Without beginning and without end. But what I heard you saying was that God exists at every point in time at the same time, which to me sounds like this sort of hypertime view which is a possibility – you can make sense of it – but as

I say I think it is extravagant and ultimately it just kicks the problem upstairs. It doesn't really solve it.³⁷

Student: I guess it really gets down to what is the true definition of time?

Dr. Craig: Well, not necessarily. I will say something about that. But I don't think that Bob and Brad differ on their definitions of time. They just conceive of God's relationship to time differently. I don't think it is a definitional matter here. It is just that one person thinks of God as being in time like us. He is enduring from one moment to the next. The other person thinks, no, God is just completely outside of these dimensions. He is not in time at all.

Student: Could you comment on God's relationship to time and his ability to answer prayer?

Dr. Craig: This, I think, gets into the question of divine omniscience and his foreknowledge of the future. Some people have argued that God must be timeless because this is the only way in which you could explain his knowledge of the future given human freedom and indeterminacy. He is outside of time and all of time is spread out before him. That is how he knows the future, and so that is how he can answer your prayers before you pray them – because he has foreknowledge of the future. I don't think that is a good argument. When we get to omniscience and we talk about divine foreknowledge, I'll try to give an account of how God can foreknow the future without being timeless. But you are certainly right in drawing our attention to the fact that some people have said that this is why they believe God is timeless because that explains how God can know a contingent future and so can answer prayers in advance of their being prayed.

Student: In terms of God's eternity, is it wise to state it such as God exists in eternal now?

Dr. Craig: This is a very common expression – isn't it? – for those who think God is atemporal – that God exists in the eternal now. I think we need to understand that this is metaphorical. It doesn't mean that there is a time in which God exists and this time is composed of only one instant. But it is kind of like an instant, as I said, in that on the atemporal view eternity is sort of like a point geometrically. In that sense it is like the present, which is also like a point geometrically. In that sense people speak of God's eternal now in the sense that it is on the analogy of a single temporal instant. As long as we understand the metaphor and the analogy, I think it is unobjectionable. But we shouldn't think that there is literally a sort of time in which God exists which is a now, but it is like the now. It is like the temporal present in that it would be a single point.

Student: A line has infinite points, and a plane has infinite lines, and a space has infinite planes. So if we look at time as agent of changes, it has infinite space. If we take snapshots of a space and a time is just an infinite of those spaces, can we not in this kind of dimensional expansion think of God in a higher dimension than time. So it has infinite time and yet he is a dimension above.

Dr. Craig: This is a good question. We can picture geometrically our space-time as a cylinder in which time will be the vertical dimension, and then the two horizontal dimensions will represent our three-dimensional space. We've suppressed one of the three dimensions of space because we being three-dimensional creatures can't draw a four-dimensional cylinder. So we suppress one of the dimensions of space and let that be time. Then we use the analogy of a disc, and this disc would be a three-dimensional space. We could imagine that this cylinder goes on forever and has existed forever in the past so that time would be infinite and you would have these spatial cross-sections as it were of space as time goes on.³⁸ I think what you are suggesting is maybe this cylinder is embedded in a higher dimension in which God exists. So God is out here so to speak and that this space-time – this four-dimensional thing – exists in this embedding higher dimensional reality in which God exists. There are some theologians who hold this view. Hugh Ross, for example, holds this. Or at least he says he holds it. When you press him on it and point out some of the problems with this point of view, he will quickly retreat and say this is just a metaphor – *I don't literally mean God is in a higher dimension; it is just a metaphorical way of speaking of a timeless God.* I think it would be better to see this as a model or illustration of a timeless God who just doesn't exist in four-dimensional space-time. He just transcends time. We shouldn't think of this as embedded in some higher dimension, but rather God is just timeless. He is just atemporal. But you are certainly right in drawing our attention to this alternative.

Student: When you have the two-dimensional graph of hypertime versus current time, and now this graph, don't you open the door for a multiverse explanation of the universe? Does that cause a problem?

Dr. Craig: I don't see how this opens the door to that. It seems to me that it is quite possible to say that God has created other space-times besides our own. That would seem to be legitimate. But I don't think that that is implied by this or dependent upon this. There is just an independent question that God may have created other space-times besides ours.

Student: Is it possible that one of the other space-times that he created besides ours would be that which the angels inhabited?

Dr. Craig: Well, the difficulty there would be if you put these angels in some other space-time then it is hard to see how they would have any interaction with us because they are in a different space-time. So if we want to say that angels are involved in our history and space and time then we need to keep them here rather than sequester them someplace else where they couldn't have any kind of causal connection with us or any kind of temporal relation.

END DISCUSSION

Let me wrap up by saying that the question of God's relationship to time is an extremely difficult one that has puzzled theologians for centuries. What I'll do next time is offer what I conceive to be the best argument for God's being timeless, and then I will offer what I think are the best arguments for God being temporal. Then we will explore how these ought to be assessed and what is the best understanding for God's relationship to time. That will be the next time in which I'll meet with you.³⁹

Lecture 6: God's Relationship To Time

We've been talking about God's eternity. By way of review, we saw that God's eternity is affirmed in Scripture as God's being beginningless and endless. He exists permanently. But the Scriptural data are underdeterminative with regard to how God relates to time. Is God trans-temporal? Is he outside of time? Is God an atemporal being who doesn't exist in time at all? Or is God rather an everlasting being who exists omnitemporally – at every time? The Scripture doesn't make that clear. Therefore this issue is one that must be resolved by philosophical theology. We need to look at arguments for and against divine timelessness and temporality.

I have written a number of books on this subject having studied it for about 11 years. One of these is called *Time and Eternity*. If you are interested in following up on this subject I'd recommend this book to you published by Crossway Books. In it I survey what I consider to be the most important arguments for God's being timeless as well as the most important arguments for God's being omnitemporal.

Of all of the various arguments that have been offered for God's being timeless I think that the best argument is probably the argument from the incompleteness of temporal life. Temporal existence is terribly incomplete in that you do not yet have your future – it is merely potential. And you no longer have the past. It is over and done with. All you have is the present. That is a brief fleeting instant that passes away as soon as it comes. So temporal existence is a fleeting sort of existence where you do not have the fullness of your entire life at once, but you just have a brief momentary slice of that life one slice after another. The argument here is that this kind of incomplete existence is incompatible with the existence of a most perfect being, which is what God is. A most perfect being should have his life all at once so to speak. He should never lose his past or have a future that is yet to be gained. He should have his life all at once.

The fleeting nature of temporal life was brought home to me very powerfully and unexpectedly years ago as I read to our children, Charity and John, Laura Ingalls Wilder's book, *Little House In The Big Woods*. I want to read to you the final paragraphs of that book. She writes,

The long winter evenings of firelight and music had come again. . . . Pa's strong, sweet voice was softly singing:

'Shall auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Shall auld acquaintance be forgot,
And the days of auld lang syne?

And the days of auld lang syne, my friend,
And the days of auld lang syne,
Shall auld acquaintance be forgot,
And the days of auld lang syne?'

When the fiddle had stopped singing, Laura called out softly, 'What are days of auld lang syne, Pa?'

'They are the days of a long time ago, Laura,' Pa said. 'Go to sleep, now.'

But Laura lay awake a little while, listening to Pa's fiddle softly playing and to the lonely sound of the wind in the Big Woods. She looked at Pa sitting on the bench by the hearth, the firelight gleaming on his brown hair and beard and glistening on the honey-brown fiddle. She looked at Ma, gently rocking and knitting.

She thought to herself, 'This is now.'

She was glad that the cosy house, and Pa and Ma and the firelight and the music, were now. They could not be forgotten, she thought, because now is now. It can never be a long time ago.⁴⁰

That passage didn't hit my children with the same force that it hit me, embroiled as I was in the study of time and eternity.⁴¹ But when I read that I was just bowled over. What makes the passage so poignant is that that moment that was so real for Laura Ingalls, that was now and could never be forgotten, is now gone! Pa and Ma are gone. The American frontier that they struggled to win is gone. Those happy golden days as she called them are gone forever never to be reclaimed. Time has a savage way of gnawing away at life making it terribly incomplete and evanescent. This sort of life, the argument says, is incompatible with the existence of a most perfect being which ought to have the fullness of life all at once and therefore to transcend time altogether.

I think that this is a powerful argument. In God's case, however, I think that the incompleteness of temporal life is diminished somewhat by his omniscience. For an eternal omniscient being, he knows the future with all the detail that he knows the present and past. He knows everything. Moreover, he recalls the past in perfect detail so that he could mentally relive it as though it were present to him. For an omniscient being, the passage of time is not so melancholy an affair, I think, as it is for finite transient beings. Therefore, the incompleteness of temporal life in the case of God I think is not quite so melancholy and deficient a mode of existence as it might be for finite temporal beings.

⁴⁰ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods* (New York: Harper & Row, 1932), pp. 237-238.

⁴¹ 5:15

Nevertheless, I think we have to admit that this argument does have some force and could motivate a doctrine of divine timelessness, unless there are arguments for divine temporality that are even more powerful and outweigh it.

So when we turn to arguments for God's being in time, it seems to me that there are two especially powerful arguments for thinking that God is temporal and does not transcend time. The first would be based on God's changing relations with the world. God changes in his relationships with things in the temporal world.

Here it is important to distinguish between what we might call intrinsic change and extrinsic change. Something changes intrinsically if it changes in one of its non-relational properties – a property that it has in and of itself. For example, an apple might change from being green to being red. That would be an intrinsic change in the apple. An extrinsic change, by contrast, would be a relational change. Something might not change intrinsically but it would change in its relations to other things about it. For example, I was once taller than my son, John, but now I am shorter than John. Is that because of an intrinsic change in me? No! I'm the same height I've always been, but I have become shorter than John as he has changed intrinsically and grown taller. I once stood in the relation "taller than" to my son, but now I stand in the relation "shorter than" to my son. So I have undergone not an intrinsic but an extrinsic change in my relationship to him.

In creating a temporal world, God would seem to undergo if not intrinsic change at least extrinsic change because in creating a temporal world God now stands in new relations like "causing the universe." God is now causally related to the universe, and he wasn't causally related to the universe existing without it. Similarly he now has the relationship minimally of co-existing with the universe – a property that he did not stand in prior to creation.⁴² Indeed, there was no moment prior to creation. So God would undergo, it would seem, these sort of extrinsic relational changes insofar as he is related to a temporal universe. That would be sufficient for being in time.

To see the point, imagine a rock existing isolated in outer space. Let's suppose this rock is absolutely changeless. It is frozen at absolute zero. I know that is physically impossible, but this is just a thought experiment. Let's imagine this hypothetical rock that is absolutely changeless and isolated in outer space. Then imagine that a meteor whizzes by and another meteor whizzes by. Clearly the rock would not be timeless even though it is intrinsically changeless. Why? Because it changes in its relation to other changing things about it. First there was the one meteor going by, then later another meteor went by. The rock, though changeless intrinsically, would clearly be in time because it is related to changing things. Since God is really related to a changing temporal world, God

would undergo extrinsic change and therefore he would be in time. This seems to me to be a very powerful argument for God's being temporal.

Let me just add this. This relational change in God becomes especially difficult for timelessness when you think of the doctrine of the incarnation. Because in the incarnation the second person of the Trinity takes on a human nature. He now is related to this human nature in a way in which he was not before. There clearly seems to be a time at which the second person of the Trinity was not yet related to the human nature that Jesus of Nazareth had, and then there is a time after which he does have a human nature and is related to that human nature. That would imply that God is therefore in time in virtue of these changing relations even if he is intrinsically changeless. Even if he is intrinsically changeless he would still be temporal in view of his changing relationships with temporal things.

The second argument in favor of divine temporality would be based upon God's knowledge of tensed facts. What do I mean by tensed facts? By tensed facts, I mean facts that are related to the past, present, and future. For example, that it is now 3:00. That would be a tensed fact. It was 2:30 a half hour ago. That is a tensed fact. It will be 3:30 a half hour from now. All of these would be tensed facts. As an omniscient being, God must know all facts. If there are facts about the world of which God is ignorant then he could not count as omniscient. If there are tensed facts then it seems to me that God would then have to know them because he is omniscient. He knows what time it is now. But if God knows that it is now 3:00, he is obviously located at that moment in time to know that it is now 3:00. If he is located at 2:30, he'll know it is now 2:30. So there would be change going on constantly in God as these tensed facts change. The simplest way to think about this is just knowing what time it is. Doesn't God know what time it is in the universe? He knows what time it is now. If God were not in time he wouldn't know whether now is the era of galaxy formation, or the time of life on Earth, or the time at which the universe is suffering thermodynamic destruction. He wouldn't know what is now happening in the universe if he is not in time. It seems to me in virtue of his omniscience God must know tensed facts and therefore must be in time. This would seem to imply not simply extrinsic but even intrinsic change in God; namely, God would be constantly changing in his thought life. He would know it is now 3:00, it is now 3:01, it is now 3:02.⁴³ There would be a flow in the contents of consciousness in God as he keeps track of what time it is.

Far from being an imperfection in God, it seems to me that this kind of knowledge is a perfection in God. It is in virtue of his omniscience that God can't be fooled about what

⁴³

time it is; he is not frozen into immobility but he keeps track of what is happening in the universe. Therefore, he knows what is going on now.

These two arguments, if sound, I think provide very powerful grounds for thinking that God is in time and that therefore they more than counterbalance the argument for divine atemporality based on the incompleteness of temporal life.

How shall we assess these two arguments for divine temporality? It does seem to me that there is one way of escape for the defender of divine timelessness. These arguments both assume that there are tensed facts about the world, about what is present, past, or future. And they assume that temporal becoming is real. That the temporal world really is changing. Things come into being and pass away. Whether or not you think that is true is going to depend on what theory of time you adopt. Whether you have a tensed theory of time (this is often called the A-Theory – that is just an arbitrary designation, not descriptive) or if you have a tenseless theory of time (this is usually called the B-Theory).

How can I explain the difference between these two theories? Let's start with the tenseless theory of time and then move to the tensed theory of time.

According to the tenseless theory of time, the difference between past, present, and future is just an illusion of human consciousness. There really is no such thing objectively speaking. Nor do things really come into being and pass away. That, again, is just an illusion of human beings. Rather, everything in time is spread out kind of like a spatial line, and everything is equally existent. For the people in 1868, 1868 is now. For the people in 2015, 2015 is now. For the people in 5030, 5030 is now. If you say which one is really now, the answer is there is no real now. It is just each of their subjective personal perspectives, none of which is objectively true.

If we were to make a diagram of this theory we can let this disk represent space. Let's suppose that as you go back in time space is shrinking so that it shrinks back to a beginning at the Big Bang. That would be the beginning of time and space. Let's suppose just for the sake of convenience that as you go into the future the universe re-contracts again down to a point at which time and space come to an end. On the B-Theory, or the tenseless theory, of time, time is merely an internal dimension that orders the spatial cross-sections of this space-time continuum. From the beginning at the Big Bang until the end at the Big Crunch it is all equally real. There is no temporal becoming. There are no tensed facts. Rather, for any cross-section of this that you pick the people at that point will think that that is now, and the people at that point will think that their point is now. But all of these are just subjective perspectives.

So on this tenseless theory of time it is very easy to think of God as existing outside of time. He isn't in this space-time continuum.⁴⁴ Therefore, he doesn't change in his relationships to it. He is related to everything in time and space from beginning to end in a tenseless way. Indeed, in one sense this creation – this space-time world – is in a sense co-eternal with God. To say it comes into being just means it has a front edge. But God never exists without it. Time is simply an internal dimension of this thing. On this view God never undergoes extrinsic change because there really is no relational change between God and things in time. Similarly, there are no tensed facts to know. What God knows is that the tenseless facts like that X occurs at $t=7$ and Y occurs at $t=10$. Those are changeless. Those never change. His mind never undergoes a stream of consciousness. He has no past, present, and future. That is just an illusion of the people in time. On this tenseless theory these arguments don't go through because God never undergoes extrinsic or intrinsic change.

By contrast, on the A-Theory of time all that really exists is the present moment. Moments that are past or moments that are future aren't real. They are purely potential. The past has gone away, the future has not yet come to be. So all that really exists is the present. On the A-Theory of time if God is causally related to the world then he will undergo extrinsic change as the present moment changes, and he will know different tensed facts about what is now happening in the universe as time elapses.

So these arguments, I think, are good arguments depending on the tensed theory of time. The arguments for divine timelessness and temporality seem to me stand or fall on your view of time. Do you think that past, present, and future are real and objective features of reality? Or do you think that the difference between past, present, and future is just a subjective illusion of human consciousness and that nothing ever really comes to be or passes away?

In my book I weigh the arguments for and against these theories of time. Without trying to go into that this morning let me simply say that it is universally acknowledged that the A-Theory (or the tensed theory) is the common-sense view of time. This is the layman's view. Things really do come to be and pass away. There really is a present and that is different than the past and future. This common-sense view is rooted in our experience of temporal becoming – as we experience the passage of time and things coming to be and passing away. I see no reason to deny that experience. It seems to me that we are perfectly rational to go with what our experience tells us: that in fact, temporal becoming is objective and there is a difference between past, present, and future.

Moreover, I have a theological objection to the tenseless theory that I would press. That is I think it emasculates the doctrine of creation. On this view, as I say, the world is really

co-eternal with God. Now, it depends upon God – it is ontologically dependent upon him. God is independent of the world, but the world is not independent of God. The world depends on God for its existence. Nevertheless there is no state of affairs in which God exists alone without the world. To say that God created the universe just means that the universe has a front edge so to speak. This whole co-eternal object depends upon God for its existence. I think that really emasculates the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing which says that there is a state of affairs in the actual world which is God existing alone. Nothing is with him. As Isaiah says, “Who was with me? No one! Nothing!” Then God speaks the world into being, and the world begins to exist in a tensed way.⁴⁵

Moreover, notice that on this view, in a very uncomfortable way, evil is never really vanquished. Evil exists here in the world. Even if later in history God’s judgment falls upon evil, evil is never really eradicated. It still exists at those earlier space-time points. But it is never really done away with. What this means is that Christ hangs permanently on the cross. The crucifixion never passes away. Certainly there is a resurrection later in the time slices. At a later time slice, Jesus rises from the dead. But the crucifixion never passes away. It is never over with. To me that is theologically objectionable. I think we want to say that God abolishes evil. He does away with evil. It is vanquished or annihilated. In order for that to happen you have to have a tensed theory. It won’t happen on the tenseless theory.

For those reasons, in my view God is in time. If time had a beginning, I would say that God existing alone without the world is timeless. So I can affirm that he has a kind of timeless existence. But I would say that is a contingent property of God, not an essential property. When he creates the universe in virtue of his real relations to the temporal world, he becomes temporal. So God without creation is timeless, but since the moment of creation he is temporal and in time.

DISCUSSION

Student: With the B-Theory, it is not hard to imagine or to understand that the Word (God) created that space-time reality with his Word as an author writes a novel. So there is no contradiction as his timelessness and his story.

Dr. Craig: This is an analogy actually that is very often used to illustrate the relationship between a timeless God and a temporal universe. Imagine that this is a novel that is written by God that has an introduction, a first chapter, later chapters, and finally a conclusion. The author stands outside the time of the novel and is external to it. But inside the novel there is a timeline, there is a storyline. That is a good illustration of this

view. But as I say on this view, unlike the case of the author and the novel, God never exists without the novel. It is co-eternal with him, unless you pull in a hypertime – a kind of second time dimension – in which he creates time. So I think the critique I offered would still stand.

Student: There are a lot of things that I worry about and try to understand and really wish I could understand. This is not one of them. So with the usual caveats that this seems simple because I am in fact simple-minded, how about simplifying it perhaps this way. To us, it is the A-Theory. That is all we have. To God, it is either the A or the B – whichever one he wants. You can have the B-Theory – in other words, I believe everything exists equally, but you have to be God to experience it. He can go back in the past, he can go back in the future, and make it exactly the way it is. You say that is not real, though. But what is real? It is as real as I am. He made me. It is real if he says it is real. Your argument about sin never being done away with. I don't see that that would . . . it just depends on where God wants to be at the time. If he wants to step into our dimension, he knows that sin is going to be done away with. He has the plans to do that. If he just chooses not to exist or step into the time frame where sin was prevalent, but Christ is not going to be on the cross forever. God can go back to that time, but he can similarly go back to the much more plentiful times in which Christ was not on the cross.

Dr. Craig: I think, in the view you are describing, it really is a B-Theory, but our experience of time is an illusion. It is not objective. It is not the way it really is. We think that the crucifixion is over with, but it is just as real as the present moment. Whether God steps in and out of this wouldn't be relevant. The fact is if you have a tenseless metaphysic of the way time is, those things are all equally real regardless of our experience which certainly is changing.

END DISCUSSION

We are out of time, in a practical sense!⁴⁶

Lecture 7: Practical Application of God's Eternity

Last time we met we were talking about the difference between a tenseless and a tensed theory of time. I suggested that your view of God's relationship to time is apt to depend upon whether you think time is tenseless or tensed. That is to say, if you think that the difference between past, present, and future is merely an illusion of human consciousness and that all events in time are spread out as it were like a line then you are probably going to think of God's eternity as a state of timeless existence, and God is related to all of the events in space and time in that timeless moment. On the other hand, if you think that time is tensed, that is to say you think that the difference between past, present, and future is a real and objective feature of the world and that things really do come into being and go out of being, then you probably are going to think that God is also in time in virtue of his real relationships to this constantly changing temporal world and in view of his knowledge of tensed facts – what time it is now. Therefore, I think that how you construe the nature of time is going to determine probably your view of God's eternity.

I suggested that for my part I think that the commonsense view of time as being tensed is the correct view of time that comports with our experience of time and there isn't any good reason to deny that experience. For that reason I think that the arguments for God's temporality are good ones – that at least since the creation of time at the beginning of the world God has been in time and experiences the succession of events as they come to be and pass away.

START DISCUSSION

Student: On that tenseless view of time, my understanding is that space would also be separated by time. In other words, we are here this week and are in the same location last week. If they are both real currently then we'd run out of space possibly. Right?

Dr. Craig: I am not sure I understand why you would think we would run out of space, but you are certainly correct in saying that at any moment in time there will be a set of events in space that exist at that time. So if we think of space as represented by this disc [Dr. Craig draws an illustration on the whiteboard] – we can't make it three-dimensional because we are going to let that third dimension represent time – as our three-dimensional space. If the universe is expanding, as you go back in time, it goes back to a beginning. There will be spatial cross-sections that you can take of this entity so that at various times you will have a set of events that exist in space at that time. If we let this slice represent last week and then this is this week, it is true that there will be this entity that will exist in the same place but at different times. In that sense, the spaces are separated by time. That is why we don't run into our future selves or our past selves. Because our future selves and past selves on this view are separated by the dimension of time. We are here in the

same place that we were last week but there is a separation of those places by time. Is that what you were asking?

Student: It is. I actually wanted to ask a followup question as well. Doesn't this introduce the problem of an actual infinite number of events?⁴⁷

Dr. Craig: Oh, I see your point. Yes. Even if space is finite so that in any cross-section of this space-time you have a finite number of events, nevertheless, unless this comes to an end, then there would be an actual infinity of events lying in the future. So even if time had a beginning, if it has no end there will be an actual infinity of events. Of course, it is possible that this could come to an end, say the expansion will reverse and everything re-contracts so the future would look like the past – it would be expanding to a maximum diameter then shrinking back again to a point. In that case you would have only a finite number of things.

END DISCUSSION

Let's look at some practical application of this doctrine to our lives.

First of all, we confront what I call the paradox of time. That paradox is that on the one hand, at least from God's perspective, there is all the time in the world, and even more! God is never in a hurry. He has no deadlines to meet. He has no timetable that is pressing upon him. God is the Lord of time and has all the time he needs to accomplish his ends. Therefore, God is never pressed for time. So, for example, when God called Moses out of Egypt, Moses was 40 years old – in the prime of his life, a prince of Egypt. You would think this would be the prime moment at which God would use Moses to liberate Israel. But no! Instead, God takes this man and drives him out into the wilderness for another 40 years until at the age of around 80 he is finally the instrument that God has crafted to lead his people into Israel. God is evidently not in a hurry in order to accomplish his ends.

So 2 Peter 3:8, for example, says the following: “But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” It doesn't matter to an eternal being. To an eternal being, any finite duration of time is like a drop in the bucket. God's timetable is therefore always right on schedule.

On the other hand – and this is the paradox – for us, at least, time is short. Because of our finite lives we are pressed by time. Romans 13:11-12a speaks to this. Paul says, “Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand.” Here you have a sense of urgency in Paul's words. The night is almost over. Day is at hand. Therefore, there are pressing demands upon us. Using a somewhat reversed metaphor, Jesus says something similar in John 9:4. Jesus said, “We must work

the works of him who sent me while it is day; night comes, when no man can work.” Here in Jesus' words as well you have this sense that there is an end coming. Night is coming. Therefore we must accomplish God's work during the day that he has given us. So from our perspective then there is a kind of pressing of time upon us in view of both the finitude of our lives and Christ's return.

I think that this paradox of time can be both a comfort to those who are exhausted in the Lord's work, and also an admonition for those who are lazy. On the one hand, it is a comfort to those who are tired and pressed in the Lord's work. They need to understand that God's timetable is right on schedule. Although they may feel harried and pressed by the demands of ministry and of life, from God's perspective it is OK. It is all on schedule. We can trust him to accomplish his work through us.⁴⁸ There is enough time in every day to accomplish all the will of God for you for that day. Therefore, you need not feel pressed.

On the other hand, for those who are lazy and indolent, who aren't involved in Kingdom work, and who are just sort of coasting through life, I think this is a real admonition. You don't know how much time you've got left. The end is going to come. Therefore, you need to be sure that your life counts for Christ. It has been rightly said, *There is only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.* We need to be sure that we are investing the time that we have, however brief it might be, in the Lord's work. So this paradox of time, I think, is a lesson for us – a comfort to those who are exhausted, but also an incentive to those who are lazy.

Secondly, God's eternity means that we must live in light of eternity. We don't want to live in light of our temporal existence, but in light of God's eternal existence. I think this cashes itself out in three ways.

First of all, it is an incentive to right living. In James 4:13-16, James explains that we have no claim upon the future. We cannot presume about what tomorrow will bring because we don't know that we are going to be here tomorrow. In James 4:13-16 he says,

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain”; whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Here James compares our life to a morning mist which is soon dispersed as the sun rises. He says our lives are so evanescent in the same way. Certainly I think in this class we've

seen that over and over again – haven't we? As people have in our midst died, been taken from us suddenly, sometimes almost without warning. We've seen how tenuous our grasp really is upon this lifetime. Therefore we need to be living in light of that; not to be presumptuous about what tomorrow brings but to say, as James says, if the Lord wills this is what we shall do. And to make sure that we are living properly now. That is Paul's emphasis in that passage from Romans 13:12b-14. In Romans 13:12, having said that the night is far gone, the day is at hand, the conclusion Paul draws from this is the following:

Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

In light of the finitude of our lives here and our soon going to meet the Lord, we need to be sure that we are living righteous lives before him such that if our lives should terminate tomorrow or tonight we will be ready to meet the Lord because we are walking in the fullness of his Spirit and clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ and his righteousness. So it is an incentive to right living, living in light of eternity.

Secondly, it is a comfort in suffering. This life, as we are so often reminded, is full of suffering. The shortcomings of this finite existence are evident to us all the time – in disease, in accidents, in the other disadvantages of finite life. But the truth of Scripture is that in light of eternity this life is just like a cramped and narrow foyer in which we are now but it leads into this great banquet hall of God's eternity.⁴⁹ All of eternity awaits us. This can make our trials bearable because in comparison with the eternal life we have with God these trials are short and transitory indeed. In 1 Peter 5:10 we read, “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.” Peter recognizes that we are going to suffer as Christians in this life, but he says after you've suffered a little while then God will call you into this eternal glory that will make the sufferings of this life seem short by comparison. The apostle Paul recognized the same thing in 2 Corinthians 4. Paul is reflecting upon all of the sufferings of this finite existence. In verses 16 through 18 he writes as follows:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature [our body] is wasting away, our inner nature [our soul, our spirit] is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Here Paul compares the sufferings of this life to the eternal glory that God is going to bestow upon us in heaven. He says in comparison with the eternal glory that God will give us the sufferings of this life shrink by comparison to literally an infinitesimal moment. That is why Paul could call them a slight momentary affliction. He wasn't being insensitive to those who suffer terribly. On the contrary, Paul himself bore both natural suffering (he had some sort of physical infirmity or disease that he carried with him) as well as terrible moral evils perpetrated against him as he was persecuted, stoned, beaten, and suffered other disasters. Yet, in spite of all that, Paul lived in light of eternity and so he understood that whatever we go through in this finite life, however painful and however horrible and terrible, nevertheless in comparison with the eternal weight of glory that God will bestow upon us these transitory afflictions are just a slight and momentary affliction that we have to bear until we go to be with him. So living in light of eternity, I think, can give us comfort in our suffering as we go through it as we certainly shall.

Finally, it reminds us of the wonderful prospect of eternal life that we as Christians have in Christ. For those of us who are in Christ – who are united with him in his death and resurrection – all of eternity awaits us. That is what we have to look forward to. John 3:16 says that God has given us everlasting life. We shall not perish, but have everlasting life. In Ephesians 2:7 Paul says, “in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” What an interesting description of what God will do in the afterlife. In the coming ages, he is going to spend eternity showering upon us the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. What a wonderful prospect we as Christians have.⁵⁰

By contrast, for those who are outside of Christ, time is a devouring beast. Every day eats away at the finite existence that they have left, however long it might be. So in 1 Corinthians 15:32b Paul, I think quite rightly, says, “If the dead are not raised [if there is no immortality], let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” There is no overriding purpose for life, so just enjoy what you can while you can. That removes, I think, any significance or meaning to your finite existence. It puts a question mark behind any sort of ultimate significance to the existence that we do have.

Shakespeare's Macbeth cries out in that play,

Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

What a description of life apart from God, apart from Christ. The book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament similarly says, “All is vanity and a striving after wind.” (1:14) “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher...All is vanity,” according to Ecclesiastes (1:2).

So for those who are outside of Christ, time is a terrible enemy, not bringing a wonderful prospect but removing any significance and meaning that life might have. Then, of course, after this finite existence there awaits them the terrible prospect of God's righteous judgment.

In Matthew 25 Jesus describes the judgment of this world that will come after this life is over. In verses 34, 41, and 46, he describes the judgment of these two groups of people. Jesus says,

Then the King will say to those at his right hand, “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” . . . Then he will say to those at his left hand, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” . . . And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

I think nothing so contrasts the wonderful prospect of eternity for those who are in Christ with the terrible horror that eternity is for those outside of Christ, more than the judgment of God that will come after this life is over.

So God's eternity, I think, has great practical application in our lives. On the one hand, it brings this paradox of time that reminds us to be busy in the Lord's work and yet not harried and pressed by it, and then also to live in light of eternity. To be living rightly, ready to die at any moment. To find comfort in suffering by the prospect of eternal life, and to enjoy this wonderful prospect of eternal life that does await us. He who is from everlasting to everlasting is our hope for everlasting life.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Once again, as it often strikes me, I just want to compliment you on your articulation and also just add that this is a place for a gigantic “Praise the Lord!”

Dr. Craig: Amen! I agree. Certainly. Thank you.

Student: Again, amen. I love everything you said. It is great. One thing though. The quote about Jesus saying *walk while you have the light* – he is speaking to us. I think when he comes there will be many that say “Lord, Lord” but didn't know him. There are times of refreshing, not just one. So he is saying while you have the light now, Christ's Holy Spirit testifies to us. The way you can not be one of those who say “Lord, Lord” is to walk, listen internally. When God convicts you of something, we all walk at different places,

but God is always telling you.⁵¹ You can be a little better with me if you trust me a little more. That walking in the light is not talking about the brevity of this life, it is talking about judgment comes and we need to listen to him as we rest in him and have joy and thankfulness and love.

Dr. Craig: I think it is both. He says, *Night is coming when no man can work. So we have to work the works of righteousness while we have time.* But then you are certainly correct in saying that therefore during this time we as Christians need to walk in the light. This is what it says in John's first epistle where he says,

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

We certainly need to be walking in the light as long as we continue to live.

Student: What I was thinking is there is also the passage where it says, *If you said you did not see, your sin would be removed but because you say you see.* He is talking to the Pharisees who thought they were walking in the light. He said *I've come to make blind those who say they see and give sight to those that don't.* A second thing is when Elijah comes again. It is not a day of darkness. It is going to be tribulation. He is going to do that. He is going to let you see the truth about when you've not really rested with him and loved him and yielded the rest of yourself to him.

Dr. Craig: OK.

END DISCUSSION

I am tempted to go on to our next section, which is the divine attribute of omnipresence. As we've been talking about God's relationship to time, now we want to turn to a discussion of God's relationship to space. That will be the attribute of God's being omnipresent, or all-present. But I think in view of the lateness of the hour we will let out early today and we will break at this point and take up the discussion of God's omnipresence when we meet next week.⁵²

⁵¹ 25:07

⁵² Total Running Time: 28:08 (Copyright © 2015 William Lane Craig)

Lecture 8: Omnipresence

I have to apologize for the laryngitis that I have this morning. I am going to do my best to croak through this lecture this morning. I've been teaching all day Friday and all day Saturday. Despite all of my tricks I didn't manage to get through without becoming hoarse. So you will have to kindly bear with me this morning. I am going to get some help from Bobby reading the Scriptures, so at least that will be clear.

The class that I've been teaching over the weekend dealt with three of the divine attributes: God's aseity, God's eternity, and God's omniscience. Two of those we've already discussed in this class. Today we turn to a third attribute of God which is his omnipresence. We want to look first at some Scriptural data concerning God's omnipresence.

The first point that we want to make is that according to Scripture God's presence is everywhere. Psalm 139:7-12 is the passage I want you to read.

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there thy hand shall lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Let only darkness cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to thee,
the night is bright as the day;
for darkness is as light with thee.

So God is everywhere present. There is nowhere that the psalmist can go where he can escape God's presence. From the realms of the underworld in Sheol to the highest heaven or the farthest part of the sea God is there.

Also, Jeremiah 23:23-24: "Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord." Here God says, *I am not just a localized deity*. A God at hand like the deities of Israel's neighbors. He says, "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" God is everywhere present.

A second point is that God does not dwell in a localized building. Look at 1 Kings 8:27 which is, as I recall, Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built." There Solomon, in dedicating the temple, says, *Heaven and earth can't contain God much less this temple*. He recognizes that God doesn't just dwell inside the temple in a local building.

Also look in the New Testament at Acts 17:24, 28a which is Paul's address on the Areopagus in Athens. "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man . . . for 'In him we live and move and have our being.'" The backdrop of that speech is the temple to Athena which was up on the Acropolis behind Paul on Mars Hill. Speaking to these Athenians in front of this incredible temple filled with a sixty-foot tall statue of Athena (a man could stand in her hand), he says God doesn't dwell in temples made by human hands nor is he served by human hands for in him we live and move and have our being. What a contrast to pagan deities. God isn't just in a local building of some sort.⁵³

START DISCUSSION

Student: Is there any comparison to other deities in and around Israel that made the same claim? Or is Jehovah the first god to make the claim to be omnipresent?

Dr. Craig: I don't claim to be a scholar in ancient comparative religions, but so far as I know the polytheistic gods of these ancient religions were not omnipresent. As far as I know, they were very localized and indeed often had material bodies and so could not be present throughout all of space. I am not aware of any analogy to the worship of Yahweh – of Israel's God – in this sense. It is, I think, quite unusual.

Student: What effect did it have then on their worship that differentiated them from those around them if they worshiped a God that was omnipresent?

Dr. Craig: Certainly one of the implications of it would be a rejection of idolatry because the pagan idols were so obviously just finite local deities that Israel found laughable. If you read Isaiah's critique of idol worship it is just biting satire. He just mocks the idea of an idol. That would be partly a reflection of God's incorporeality compared to the idols, but also I think of omnipresence. Think of the psalmist where he thinks of God as everywhere and there is nowhere he can go where he can escape God's presence. That is very different, I think, than these pagan gods and pagan religions. One thinks of Jonah in this connection where Jonah did try to escape from the Lord in this way taking the ship to Tarshish and trying to flee God's presence. Of course he was unable to. God was right there and corralling him.

Student: Would you deal with God's presence in the temple in Israel on the Temple Mount where he filled the temple?

Dr. Craig: You do have this idea of the Shekinah Glory of God where there is a special manifestation of God in the Tabernacle and in the Temple. But that should not be thought in light of the verses we have read to exhaust God's presence. It is not as though he were there and there alone. There was a special manifestation of God in the Holy of Holies but it did not exhaust his presence.

Student: I was just going to comment on the other gods that were around at that time. I think, when it says *Now there is no intermediary between God and man but the man Christ*, prior to that other beings were inserting themselves between God and man as part of the depravity that we've fallen to. That is what other religions were.

Dr. Craig: Yes, there were priests certainly that mediated between, for example, Zeus and people. But these gods themselves were very finite limited beings.

Student: I am attributing that they were mediating between – they were inserting themselves.

Dr. Craig: There wasn't any higher god beyond them.

Student: Trying to take the place.

Dr. Craig: OK, taking the place of God. Yes. But it is not as though Zeus and Mercury and these other deities were mediators to some higher being. They were it. It was just a sort of race of supermen that existed in addition to human beings.

END DISCUSSION

Let's do a little systematic thinking about God's omnipresence. It seems to me that there are two opposite errors that need to be avoided with respect to God's relationship to space.⁵⁴

First of all, we should not think of God as localized in an earthly spot. That includes the church. When we say sometimes that the church is God's house we don't mean that in the sense that God's presence is there in some way that he is not present elsewhere. We can speak of the church building as God's house in the sense that it is set apart for God. It is a sacred site dedicated to the Lord and his worship, but there aren't sacred spots in the world on Earth where God is especially present in a local kind of way. God is present everywhere.

The opposite error would be to think that God is localized in heaven. I am amazed often in talking even with adult Christians who think God is in heaven sitting on a throne. That

he is some sort of humanoid being that is up there in heaven and is localized there. That would be the opposite mistake. The doctrine of God's omnipresence says that God is everywhere present. As Jeremiah says he fills heaven and Earth. Solomon says heaven and Earth cannot contain thee. These opposite errors need to be avoided. We shouldn't think of God as localized in an earthly place, but neither should we think of him as localized in heaven.

So how does God relate to space? Well, in the same way that the Bible is underdeterminative with respect to God's relationship to time, it is also underdeterminative with regard to God's relationship to space. That is to say, it is not clear whether we should think of God as existing everywhere in space or whether we should think of him as transcending space altogether. Recall those two different views of God's relationship to time. Does God exist at every time that there is? Or does God completely transcend time and not exist in any sense in the temporal dimension? Similarly, the question here with respect to space is: is God everywhere in space or does God transcend space altogether?

Certainly the Bible speaks as though God is everywhere in space. Think of Psalm 139 again – that God is everywhere in space. But traditionally Christian theology hasn't understood God to be diffused throughout space, but rather to transcend space altogether. Since God is spirit (that is to say, he is incorporeal – God does not have a body) so obviously he is not in space in the sense of having extension or being a three-dimensional object. But neither should we think of God as some sort of invisible ether or vapor that is spread throughout space so that we are, so to speak, moving through God as we move about in the world. This would have, I think, a number of mistaken consequences. It would mean, for example, that if the universe is finite then God is finite because God would only fill the finite universe – the finite space that there is. And it certainly is possible that the universe and space is finite in which case God would be finite, not infinite. Also, this conception of God as spread out like an invisible ether would mean that God is not entirely present at every point in space. It would mean there is sort of like a portion of God inside my cup of tea and then the rest of him is outside. Or there is a certain cubic amount of God in this room but then the rest of him is outside of the room. That surely isn't correct. What one would want to say is that God is entirely present everywhere in space.

If God exists in space, he would have to be somehow related to the physical universe in such a way that he would be wholly present at every point in space rather than just partially present at every point in space.⁵⁵ There is an analogy to this, and that would be the way in which my soul is present in my body. I am a body-soul composite. My soul

seems to be present everywhere in my body. It is not as though my soul exists in my head in my brain, or in my heart or some other part of my body. Nor is my soul spread throughout my body like a ghost where a part of it is in my arm and a part of it is in my other arm or in my leg. Rather the union of the soul with the body would be that somehow if the soul is in the body it is everywhere present wholly in the body. The soul would not be spread out or diffused throughout the body but wholly present at every point in the body. Maybe one could say that that is the way in which God is related to the universe or to space. As the soul inhabits the body in such a way that it is wholly present at every point in the body, so God is in the world in such a way that he is wholly present at every place in space.

Certainly, the biblical view avoids any suggestion that the universe or the world is God's body. God is incorporeal. God doesn't have a body. But the point would be that perhaps he is present in the world in an analogous way in which my soul is present in my body. The difference between my soul's union with my body and God's presence in the world is that the world does not serve God as a sort of sense organ by means of which God knows what is happening in the world. God isn't dependent upon the world for his knowledge of what's happening in the way that my soul is dependent upon my eyes and my ears and my taste and so forth for navigating the world and sensing the world. So the world is not the body of God. That analogy fails in view of the fact that God doesn't use the world as a sort of sense organ in the way that the soul uses the body to sense what is happening in the world. But perhaps one could say that even though the world is not God's body that nevertheless God is wholly present at every point in space in the way in which the soul is present at every place in the body.

Some traditional medieval theologians like Anselm actually did endorse this concept of God's omnipresence. They called it the immensity of God. It is not the same exactly as omnipresence, but God's immensity connoted that God is wholly present at every point in space. He is there in a literal sense. In that sense, we really are in God as Paul says in the verse from Acts 17: "In him we live and move and have our being." This would be the notion of God's immensity. This is an element in traditional theology.

On the other hand, God is also thought to transcend space. Since God is the creator of the universe there is a state of affairs of the actual world of God existing alone without time or space. Since God is not a physical object his existence doesn't require space. If we think of God "prior to" creation or "without" the world, God would exist without space. He would be spaceless. There would be no space. Space would come into being when God creates the physical world. Perhaps, as I've suggested, time as well comes into existence at that point. At the moment of creation both time and space come to exist.

The question would be: in creating space, does God then enter into space in the way that I've argued that his creation of time would involve his entering into time?⁵⁶ You will remember I argued that in virtue of God's changing relations with a temporal world and in virtue of his knowledge of tensed facts like what time it is now, if God creates time then he is immediately drawn into time and so becomes temporal at that point. Is there anything analogous to that with respect to creating space? I can't see that there is. I don't see that there is anything about the creation of space that would "spatialize" God. Why? Because although creation is a temporal act, creation isn't a spatial act. It is not an act like bumping into something or pushing something or moving something. All of those would require that the cause be in space. If you bump or push something the cause must be in space. But the creation of space, it seems to me, isn't itself a spatial act. So there isn't anything about creation that would require God to enter into space at that time.

I am more inclined to the view to say that God simply transcends space. In that case, what omnipresence amounts to is that God is cognizant of and causally active at every point in space. That is what omnipresence means. It doesn't mean that God is literally in space. God transcends space. But he knows what is happening at every point in space, and he is causally active at every point in space, causing things to happen there and causally sustaining them in existence. So God, on this conception, is a non-spatial, transcendent, infinite mind who is conscious of and active at every point in space.

START DISCUSSION

Student: When we keep referring to God here, are we talking about God the Father as that person of the Trinity? Are you making a differentiation between God the Father's omnipresence versus the Holy Spirit? I would think there is certain places where we say the Holy Spirit is not. He is not in some people.

Dr. Craig: I was speaking of God with respect to the whole Godhead. But you are right. There are passages in the book of Acts where, for example, with Cornelius' household, the Spirit fell upon them. It sounds like a very physical act almost. Then this whole notion of being filled with the Holy Spirit. It sounds in many cases like the Holy Spirit actually comes to indwell a person and live in him. On the view I am suggesting, that would be to say that the Holy Spirit produces certain causal effects there like speaking in tongues, or regeneration, being born again to a new life. But it wouldn't be interpreted literally as God is like a sort of a spirit like (I almost hate the comparison) but the way demonic possession would be where this demon literally inhabits the person's body and controls him and takes over. It would be different than that. I think it is an open question but on the view that I've suggested it wouldn't be a sort of literal spatial presence.

Student: An issue with him coming into space when he creates it, wouldn't partially an issue be he is also fully present in another realm – the spiritual realm of heaven – when he created that? Then you'd have to say if his body was the universe it seems like you'd have to go beyond that to also his presence being not in the universe but in the heavenly realm as well.

Dr. Craig: I think that someone like Anselm would combine these two views – that God is both transcendent in the sense that, say, the universe is finite, God is not finite even though he is immense. So God would be both immense in the sense that he is wholly present at every point in space.⁵⁷ But then also he would be causally active at and cognizant of every point in space and wouldn't be exhausted so to speak by his presence in space. I think someone like Anselm would want to combine these two views. I think that deserves more thought. This is an area that is very under-explored in Christian philosophy today. There has been lots of philosophers writing on God and time but almost no one is working on God and space. So if you are a young philosophy student thinking of what would be a good doctoral dissertation topic, here is one where you can, I think, make a real contribution.

Student: Several times in Scripture, God has told sinners they will depart from him. People have used that as a way to say that hell is a place from which God has removed his presence. What do you think about that?

Dr. Craig: That is a wonderful question. The doctrine of omnipresence would say that God is present in hell. If he were not causally active there and cognizant of what is happening there, hell would just be annihilated. It wouldn't exist apart from God's sustaining presence. So God is certainly present in hell. But I think what the Scripture means when it says that these persons are separated from the face of the Lord or God's presence is speaking of a relational presence. He may be there but they are not related to him so they have no consciousness of him, no experience of him. It would be as though God were utterly absent to them. But he would be ontologically or metaphysically present, but not relationally present.

Student: I like the idea of putting new doctoral students to work, so my question is if God is causally active in every point what consequences might that have for the proposal of theistic evolution?

Dr. Craig: Well, are you asking me or these doctoral candidates? *[laughter]*

Student: You, for anything that you know or anything you think could be explored or worked on.

Dr. Craig: This raises the question of miracles. When I say God is causally active at every point in space, I am not necessarily saying miraculously. When we get to the doctrine of divine providence and talk about God's relationship to the world, I think we will see that God is causally active in everything that happens in the world, but he can work through the secondary causes rather than immediately in a sort of miraculous way. We don't want to maintain that God works in the world only in a kind of immediate miraculous way. That is a doctrine called occasionalism which was held to by certain medieval Islamic philosophers and in modern Western philosophy by a French philosopher Nicolas Malebranche. What they said was that when you hold the match to the cotton and the cotton combusts and turns black and smoldering, the fire doesn't really cause the cotton to combust. What happens is that merely on the occasion of the fire coming into proximity with the cotton, God causes the cotton to combust. So really there are no secondary causes. Things in the universe don't cause anything. Everything is caused by God. You can see how that would fit in with Islamic determinism and fatalism. We don't want to affirm that. I think we want to affirm that God has created things in the world that have causal powers and God gives them a certain autonomy to produce their effects. He cooperates along with them to make those effects. He works through secondary causes. With respect to evolution, the question would be: did God choose to work through the means of random mutation and natural selection to bring about biological complexity, or did he intervene miraculously to produce new lifeforms without the instrumentality of secondary causes? That would be a different question.⁵⁸

Student: It seems like in dealing with the Godhead, we've talked about God the Father. You've dealt with the Holy Spirit a little bit. But when we deal with Jesus Christ and his resurrected glorified body which we know has certain capabilities that we don't have with these bodies, I would address it to the idea of the Catholic view of transubstantiation where they have the Eucharistic celebration and believing the actual change. You talked about that under the Doctrine of Christ. The idea of Christ being able to be point-localized possibly around the world at the same time in all of these Eucharistic celebrations.

Dr. Craig: You are absolutely correct to draw our attention to these debates over the real presence in the sacraments. This is where medieval theologians reflected most upon God's relationship to space – not in some abstract philosophical sense, but in the context of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist. They distinguished all of these different ways in which something could be present in space, and argued that Christ's body could be present in this very special way in the Eucharist that is different in the way a chair or table is present. You are absolutely right in saying these debates are very relevant to the issue here.

END DISCUSSION

Let me just wrap up this morning by saying whatever view you take of God's relationship to space, I think we can all agree on the fundamental point that the omnipresence of God means that there is no place to which God's knowledge and power do not extend. That would be common coin regardless of which view you take. There is no place to which God's knowledge and power do not extend.

In our next class we will look at what application this truth has to our personal lives.⁵⁹

Lecture 9: Practical Application of God's Omnipresence / God's Immutability

Today we come to some thoughts of application concerning the attribute of divine omnipresence that we've been talking about. What application does it have to our lives to know that God is everywhere present? Let me just mention a couple of things.

1. It means that *we can contact God at every location*. No matter where we are we can call upon God and he is there. You may remember when you were in grade school, the teacher would sometimes call the roll and each student would respond "present" when his name was called. That is similar to our ability to call upon God. No matter where we are, we call upon his name and he answers "present!" If you are in San Francisco, God calls out "present!" If you are in Munich, God answers, "present!" If you are in Rio de Janeiro he says "present!" there as well. Everywhere that we need to call upon God we will find him present there.

I must say that when Jan and I first began to travel abroad and to live in Europe, I wondered how would it be? Would God be equally real there or would we have left him behind in the United States? It may sound like a silly question but I did wonder. What we found was no matter where we traveled and lived, the Lord was present there equally as we had known him back in the United States. So God can be contacted. He is present. He is available at every place that you are.

2. That implies that *we should practice the presence of God*. We should be aware and constantly conscious of his presence with us. I am not talking about trying to crank up some sort of emotion, but just a kind of awareness that God is there. He is not some distant being far away. He is there with you. In particular, when we are tempted to sin we need to realize God is there and he's watching. That would, I think, make it more difficult to sin flagrantly right in his very presence. Yet, he is really present there when we are tempted to sin and fall away. We need to be constantly practicing the presence of God as we go through life.

I think that we should thank God for his presence. We should thank him for being there with us. So often people will pray for folks by saying, "Lord, be with us today in Defenders class" or "Be with so-and-so." I used to be somewhat impatient with that type of prayer because I thought you don't need to pray that God will be with you. You don't need to pray that God will be with someone. God already is. Therefore, we ought to thank him that he is here with us, or thank him that he is with a person. But I think I've come to see that the intent of those prayers is not to simply pray that God's presence would be with them but rather that God would be there for them in the sense of stand by them, to encourage them, strengthen them, convict them if necessary, help them to persevere. I

would just suggest that sometimes, if that is what we mean, that we ought to say that. When we pray for someone think of what they need. Is it encouragement? Is it strengthening? Is it guidance? To pray that God would do that for them if that is what we mean when we say, “God be with them.” Because his presence is already with them, what they need now is some extra measure of grace like encouragement, guidance, strengthening, or whatever.

The last words of the Gospel of Matthew – Matthew 28:20 – are the words of Jesus, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” So we are never alone as Christians. Christ is with us. God is with us. Whether we are at work, whether we are studying, whether we are engaged in witnessing or ministry, he is there with us.⁶⁰ That also includes times of persecution, illness, and even death. God is with us then as well. The words of the psalmist in Psalm 23:4 are our comfort: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil for thou art with me.” This is the comfort that we as Christians can claim in virtue of God’s omnipresence.

Let’s go on to our next attribute that we want to discuss, and that is God’s immutability which means his unchangeability. Let’s look first at some scriptural data related to God’s being immutable.

1. The Scripture indicates that *God is unchangeable in his existence*. Psalm 102:25-27.

The psalmist writes,

Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of thy hands.
They will perish, but thou dost endure;
they will all wear out like a garment.
Thou changest them like raiment, and they pass away;
but thou art the same, and thy years have no end.

God is changeless in his existence. As we saw in discussing God’s eternity, God never comes into or goes out of being. He exists permanently. So he is unchangeable in his being, in his existence.

2. *God is unchangeable in his character*. In Malachi 3:6 the prophet gives Israel these words of assurance from the LORD: “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” The reason Israel is not destroyed is because of the unchangeable character of God. “I the LORD do not change” - indicating that his character is always consistent.

Over in the New Testament, in James 1:17, James writes, “Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there

⁶⁰ 5:00

is no variation or shadow due to change.” Here James says that God’s generosity, his loving kindness and character, is unchanging. There is no variation or shadow due to change. This is expressed in his kindness and generosity to us. So God is unchanging in his character.

3. *God is unchangeable in his faithfulness.* Psalm 119:89-90: “For ever, O LORD, thy word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Thy faithfulness endures to all generations; thou hast established the earth, and it stands fast.” Here the psalmist speaks of God’s faithfulness that is everlasting, ever-enduring, and unchangeable.

Then in the New Testament, similarly we have in Hebrews 6:17-18 the affirmation of God’s unchanging faithfulness:

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us.

Here the writer of Hebrews speaks of God’s promise and then God’s solemn oath.⁶¹ Both of these, he says, are unchangeable things. His promise and his oath are unchangeable and therefore impossible that they should prove false. This gives us a solid basis for our hope. They are based upon God’s unchangeable faithfulness.

4. *God is unchangeable in his wisdom and plan.* Psalm 33:11: “The counsel of the LORD stands for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.” Here God’s counsel – his wisdom, his plan – is said to be unchanging and ever-enduring.

So the Scriptures indicate that God is not only changeless but even unchangeable in a number of respects.

START DISCUSSION

Student: God’s character is unchangeable. Can God change his mind as with Hezekiah?

Dr. Craig: This is a really good question because there are passages in the Scriptures that, if you take them at face value, it looks like God changes his mind. In fact there are statements where it says that God repented of what he was going to do and did something differently. The difficulty in taking those passages literally, or at face value, is that the Scriptures also affirm (as we will see later on) that God is omniscient. That is to say, he is all-knowing. That includes the knowledge of the future. Even the knowledge of future thoughts of people as well as their actions. So if God has complete knowledge of the future, it is impossible that anything could happen that would make him change his mind,

⁶¹ 10:04

because he would already know about it. If you already know what is going to happen, it is already factored into your plans for the future, for your counsel. So I would say that these passages are what we would call anthropomorphisms in Scripture. They would be human ways of describing God. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is not a philosophy book. It is not even a systematic theology book. It is a book of stories of people's actions and interactions with the God of Israel. These stories have all of the color and verve of an ancient storyteller. I think it would be a mistake to press them philosophically or theologically with regard to things like God's changing his mind. I would say that those represent the human perspective on the situation. That is how it appears to us, but in fact God knew all along, for example, that Hezekiah would pray. He knew all along that the Ninevites would repent and turn to him. So from God's point of view there really isn't any change. That is required, as I say, by God's omniscience and foreknowledge of the future.

Let me just say one other thing about that. If you do press that literalistic sort of face value reading then I think you are going to end up with a sort of Mormon concept of God where God has a nose and eyes and ears and rides on the clouds and breathes smoke out of his nostrils because the Scripture also uses all of those anthropomorphic descriptions of God which we know are not to be taken literally because God is spirit. He doesn't have a body as we'll see later on. I think that kind of naïve literalistic hermeneutic is ultimately going to lead to a very distorted concept of God like you have in Mormonism where God has a humanoid physical body that is somewhere in outer space.

Student: To put kind of an exclamation point on that, 1 Samuel 15:29 says, "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."

Dr. Craig: The word there that your translation translates "change his mind" is often the word "repent." In your older translations, "He is not a man that he should repent." This is one of the passages that is relevant to what we were just talking about. Here it says God doesn't repent. He doesn't change his mind.⁶²

Student: There are several others. The other one that is almost the same wording is Numbers 23:19: "God is not a man that he should lie nor a Son of Man that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act?"

Dr. Craig: Again, the difficulty is that then you have these other stories where it explicitly says he repented, or changed his mind. So you've got a surface contradiction there that you've got to reconcile. I think the way to reconcile it is what I've just suggested. Thank you for those verses. That is very helpful.

Student: This is also a question about the changeless character. What is the explanation for how God is depicted in, say, the Old Testament and by Jewish philosophers as almost angry and very fear-worthy. Then in the New Testament and in Christian texts, obviously Jesus is depicted as very loving, but even God is depicted as a much more forgiving and loving being.

Dr. Craig: I think that that isn't true. In the Old Testament, you will find many passages about God describing himself like a mother yearning for her child at her breast and caring for Israel with tenderness and kindness. Equally in the New Testament, read the book of Revelation and you will see passages about a God as wrathful and destructive as any Old Testament passage about God. But I think that the really knockdown argument that the God of the New Testament has the same character as the God of the Old Testament is Jesus. Namely, who was the God of Jesus of Nazareth? Who was the God that Jesus worshiped and proclaimed? It was the God of the Old Testament. The God of the Hebrew Bible was Jesus' heavenly Father. So this idea that you can play off Jesus and his teachings about the kind, forgiving heavenly Father against the God of the Old Testament is just clearly wrong because the God that Jesus taught about as his heavenly Father meant to reveal is the God of the Hebrew Bible. He didn't see a contradiction between their character. Indeed, he thought that they are the same. I think that is exactly right.

Student: How do you view God's immutability in light of your teaching on God's timelessness before creation or *sans* creation and then being in time with creation. How does that go?

Dr. Craig: Alright. We will get into that when we talk about the systematic summary of this. I listed several respects in which the Bible says God does not change. But notice it didn't say that he is utterly changeless in every respect. Indeed we saw in discussing God's eternity that it seems very plausible to think that God knows what time it is. In which case, he is constantly changing in knowing "It is now 3:00," "It is now 3:01," "It is now 3:02." I don't think that that kind of change contradicts anything that we've seen in Scripture. In fact, the Bible constantly describes God in temporal terms. I will say something more about this when we get to the systematic part.

Student: In regards to God's faithfulness, like in Romans 1:24 and Psalm 81:12, it talks about God giving them over to their wicked ways, giving them over to their lustful desires, those sorts of things. What would you say on that? Is that in God's faithfulness?

Dr. Craig: There you are talking about God's judgment upon the wicked who turn away from him. So he abandons them to their own immorality. I don't see that in any way inconsistent with his faithfulness. What that is saying, I think at least in Romans 1, is that God allows them to go their own way. He doesn't force them to do what he wants. But having given them freedom to rebel against him, he abandons them to their own deserts.

It says three times he gave them up to these passions and lusts and activities that they had chosen. He let's human wickedness run its course. I think that is one of the reasons the Christian isn't surprised at the horrible human evil in the world, because God doesn't intervene to stop it. He lets it go on.⁶³ He lets human depravity work itself out. But he always remains, as we will see, faithful in the sense that he is a just and forgiving God. He justly punishes the wicked, but he is prepared and eager to forgive and cleanse the wicked if they will simply respond to his grace and repent. In that sense he is perfectly consistent and faithful, I think.

Student: A typical anti-theist argument that I'll hear from people sort of relates to what someone else was talking about in terms of what would motivate God to create humanity if he is kind of changeless throughout his existence. Creation itself is not co-eternal with God, so why would he bring it into existence in a sense at a point in time?

Dr. Craig: If I understand your question, are you asking, *What would be God's reason for creating a temporal world of free creatures?*

Student: The thing I will hear sometimes is: what changed in God's mind that suddenly he says "Let's bring man into existence"?

Dr. Craig: I wouldn't see that as any sort of change whatsoever. God, being omniscient . . . again, this is not so much a consequence of his immutability as it is a consequence of his omniscience. If he knows everything, he knows the future. It is not as though he changes his mind and says, *Oh, let's make man. I hadn't intended to do that, but let's do that.* Not at all. This is an eternal counsel that he freely undertakes to create temporal creatures. I think the reason for that is that he wants to create finite persons whom he can then invite and bring into the inter-Trinitarian fellowship of the divine persons as adopted sons and daughters of God. We come into this fellowship with God that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoyed *sans* creation or before the world began. It is a mark of God's condescension and his grace that he would create finite creatures and for their benefit bring them into being so that they could have this incomprehensible good and privilege of being invited into this inter-Trinitarian fellowship as adopted children of God.

Student: To punctuate what you are saying, we even do that as humans. We become parents knowing we may have difficulties with kids or they may encounter difficulties and problems. Or we create machines like cars knowing that some of them will be involved in accidents and what have you.

Dr. Craig: Of course, with our knowledge, it is a probability judgment. Right? We don't know how our children will turn out. But we at least run that risk. In God's case, though, I think he does know that some will freely reject his grace and separate themselves from

him for eternity. But he is willing to do that because of those who will not reject his grace but will accept it and come into this inestimable good. The good of those who would freely receive his grace should not be prevented because of the wicked and evil rejection of God that those who would separate themselves from him forever would bring about.

Student: Also, on his omniscience and the changing of the mind, I think he conforms us to his will. We view it or understand it as mind-changing, but actually we were the ones that conform to his mind.

Dr. Craig: Yes. That is what I was trying to say – that it represents a human perspective. For example, when Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, of course God relented on his judgment when he said, *Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed*. That wasn't a piece of foreknowledge of the future. What that was was a warning saying, *Unless you repent, in forty days you will be destroyed*. But God knew they would repent. That is why he sent Jonah. So his judgment no longer is appropriate. As you say, the change is on the part of the human agents, not on the part of God.⁶⁴

Student: How do we answer those who claim that when the second member of the Trinity took on flesh and took on the attributes of man (added them to – even though we realize that is an “adding to” and not a “giving up” of any of his godly qualities at that point in time) they would claim that that was change when he took on flesh.

Dr. Craig: Did you hear this question? It was very subtly posed – nicely posed I must say. He said the incarnation is not a matter of the second person of the Trinity divesting himself of certain attributes. It is not a matter of his laying aside omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, and becoming a man. No, he says he keeps all those attributes but he does assume a human nature in addition to the divine nature he already has. He asks isn't that a change? I am inclined to say yes, but I don't see that as problematic. I don't see that as contradicting any of these respects in which the Bible says God is immutable. The second person of the Trinity changed in the sense that at one time he did not have a human nature, and at another time he did have a human nature. To me that is just unobjectionable. I don't see any problem with that biblically or theologically. It would be a sort of relational change in the sense that he comes to assume and be related to a human nature. That is a relation in which he did not stand before. I've argued that God undergoes that kind of relational change in creating the world. He comes to stand in the relation of co-existing with the universe or sustaining the universe. That is a relation which he didn't stand existing alone without the universe.

Student: I agree that God does not change in his purpose of manifesting his attributes or his nature. But he dared to give his creatures free will. Then he committed to love these

creatures. In relationship of not abandoning his creatures with free will he has to change many strategies in response in order to bring out his unchanging purpose. I don't see the changing of strategy or response as change because he doesn't change anything in his nature, he doesn't change in his purpose. But, yeah, in dealing with free-willed beings there are just many changes he had to respond to.

Dr. Craig: I think you are right in saying that probably the word “change” can be misleading. In one sense he doesn't change his mind, he doesn't change his nature. But I think you are quite right in saying God adopts different strategies depending upon people's behavior. That is not a change of mind on his part. He knows this from eternity past, but he doesn't always pursue the same strategy and not with everybody.

END DISCUSSION

Let me say a few words by way of systematic summary about this in our closing minutes.

Under the influence of Greek philosophy, traditional Christian theology came to embrace the immutability of God in a very radical sense to mean the absolute changelessness of God in every respect. This is one of the unfortunate areas where I think those who decry the influence of Greek philosophy on biblical thought are correct. The God of Aristotle was called The Unmoved Mover. He was the cause of change; he was the mover of things. But he was himself unmoved, changeless in every respect. He was utterly changeless. The way he moved things was simply by being an object of desire, much in the same way that a statue, though utterly changeless, can inspire admiration in a viewer of the statue.⁶⁵ In the same way the God of Greek philosophy was this changeless entity that moves things only by being an object which things desired and therefore were motivated to act in different ways.

This is in striking contrast, I think, to the God of the Hebrew Bible which is the living, dynamic God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is not frozen into immobility like a statue. Rather, he acts and reacts in personal relationships with human beings in history, in time. Therefore he exhibits that kind of changing activity that is appropriate to that.

I see no reason to think that God needs to be immutable in this radical Greek sense of the term. The arguments for that kind of immutability, I think, are not very good. For example, the most common argument for absolute immutability would be to say that since God is a perfect being any change in him would be a change for the worse which is impossible. So as a perfect being he cannot change. He is already in a state of perfection. Any change from that would have to be necessarily a change for the worse. Why is this not a good argument? I think it is a bad argument because it assumes that change only occurs, so to speak, on the vertical scale of better-to-worse or best-to-worst. But why

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couldn't God change, so to speak, on a horizontal scale where he remains perfect but he changes in ways that are not for the worse? Why can't there be horizontal change, so to speak, but not change vertically on the scale of best-to-worst? For example, take the illustration of God's knowing what time it is. If God changes in knowing it is now three o'clock and then a minute later he knows it is now 3:01, he's changed. But would anyone say that is a change for the worse in God? He somehow lost his perfection? I think not. On the contrary, as I've said, knowing what time it is is a perfection in a being. That is a better being than one that doesn't know what time it is. So I don't think there is any reason to think that God's perfection implies that any change in God would be a change for the worse. He could change in neutral ways, like knowing what time it is, without changing for the worse. So I do not think that we should adopt this view that God is like an ice statue or a mannequin in a store window who is utterly immutable in every way.

How should we understand God's immutability? We will save that for next week. This is a good point at which to break. I will share with you next week what positive concept of immutability I think we ought to have.⁶⁶

Lecture 10: Understanding God's Immutability / God's Personal Attribute of Incorporeality

We are wrapping up our discussion of divine immutability this morning. I argued last time that we should not follow the path charted by ancient Greek philosophers in thinking of God as utterly immutable. God, in the Hebrew Bible, is not frozen into immobility like an ice statue. Rather he is a dynamic interactive God who acts in history and interacts with people and therefore is not absolutely changeless and immutable. So how should we understand God's immutability in light of the scriptural passages that do affirm that God cannot change?

J. I. Packer, I think, gives a nice summary of God's immutable attributes in his book *Knowing God*. Here is what Packer says.

1. *God's life does not change.* That is to say, God exists forever and he neither matures nor regresses. God is permanent, eternal, never begins to exist, never ceases to exist, and as Packer says he neither gets better or gets worse. He neither matures nor regresses. He has a perfect permanent life.
2. *God's character does not change.* God's mercy, love, faithfulness, justice never change. God's moral qualities are essential to God. Although he may deal with people in different ways, they will all be consistent with his fundamental moral character which is immutable.
3. *God's truth does not change.* That is to say, the word of the Lord endures forever. God's revelation to us stands secure. Obviously, that revelation progresses from the old covenant into the new covenant as further truth is unfolded. But God's word is trustworthy and true and therefore can be relied upon.
4. *God's ways do not change.* Again, God certainly does deal with people in different ways. He dealt with the people in the old covenant in a different way than he deals with us. There was a system of animal sacrifices and temple worship in the old covenant that is done away with now. But I think what Packer is saying is that God, in the ways he deals with people, is consistent in dealing with men. He punishes sin consistently. He bestows grace freely. It is not as though God is capricious or changing in the way he deals with people. His different ways will be expressions of that deeper consistent way of dealing with human persons – punishing sin and unrighteousness and awarding or bestowing grace and forgiveness freely.
5. *God's purposes do not change.* God's plans are from eternity past with full foreknowledge of the future. Nothing catches God by surprise. He doesn't need to change his plan or adjust with mid-course corrections because his plans are set from eternity past.

Therefore there is simply no need to change. Indeed change is ruled out in virtue of his full foreknowledge of the future. So God's purposes and plans are unchangeable.

6. *God's Son does not change.* Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

I think that gives us a nice summary of the ways in which we can affirm biblically that God is immutable but without falling into this fallacy of thinking that God is utterly and totally changeless. He can change in certain contingent ways but he will not and cannot change in his life, his existence, his fundamental character, and in the way he deals with human persons.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I know you've been asked this before but I can't remember your answer. I know there are some verses in the Bible that makes it sound like God learns certain things. Does that have any applications on his immutability? How does that happen?⁶⁷

Dr. Craig: It would if you interpret those literally. It would mean that he could learn new things. I think, again, this is going to be related to divine foreknowledge. If you think that God does have complete foreknowledge of the future (we are going to talk about that when we get to omniscience – we only hinted at it so far) then it would be impossible for God to learn something new in the sense of learning some new propositional fact. What he would know would be whether or not that event were happening now, or whether it is still in the future and therefore to be anticipated, or has already occurred and is in the past. In the sense that he knows tensed facts, it is true that God at one point knows Christopher Columbus will discover America, and then later he knows Christopher Columbus is discovering America, and later he knows Christopher Columbus did discover America. Would you call that learning new things? In a sense he learns something new. He learns that tensed fact. But the fundamental propositional content of those facts is the same. It is just that he either knows it will happen, it is happening, or it has happened. But it would be impossible for him to learn some new propositional fact if he is completely omniscient and has foreknowledge of the future.

Passages where, for example, God says to Abraham *I am going to go down and see if the reports that have come to me from Sodom and Gomorrah are true* would be an anthropomorphic element of the story. It would reflect the storyteller's art and making it an exciting story about how Abraham converses with God and God says *I am going to go down there and find out whether these reports are true*. God doesn't need to go down to Sodom to see if this is true. He is omnipresent, right? He is also omniscient. This would, I think, simply be a part of the narrative that shouldn't be pressed for theological precision.

Student: There is a quote from C. S. Lewis where he said, *Prayer doesn't change God; it changes me*. I wonder if you could comment in light of when we pray for others or when we pray for ourselves for healing or whatever. Why do we do that?

Dr. Craig: Lewis is making the point from the quotation that you cited that prayer is good for us. Prayer is a spiritual discipline that helps us to draw near to God, to depend on him, and to be more devoted to him. But I am not persuaded that that is all that prayer does – that prayer just affects us. I think prayer affects God as well, and that our prayers make a difference in what God wills and does. Does that mean that the purpose of prayer is to change God (the subject of this section – immutability)? No! It doesn't mean that we change God's mind. God knew from eternity past that we would pray at that moment. And from eternity past he knew how he would respond to those prayers. It may well be the case that if we had not prayed, God would have decided to do something different. So prayers really do make a difference. But they don't make that difference by changing God's mind. He will foreknow how you will pray and will answer accordingly or if you, say, fail to pray because you are disobedient or sinful, he may withhold some blessing because you've refused to pray. So prayer, I think, really does make a difference, but we shouldn't think of it in terms of changing God.

Student: I have a question about the second person of the Trinity – the Son. Jesus Christ was and is a human being. But if you read certain biblical passages, it almost seems like the flesh was added later on. Can you explain that? I have a little trouble understanding that.

Dr. Craig: Actually, someone raised this very point last week. What we want to say in the incarnation (if you are an orthodox Christian) is that the incarnation is not a matter of the second person of the Trinity giving up some of his attributes – like giving up omnipresence and becoming shrunk down to Palestine and walking around in Galilee.⁶⁸ That is not the way we should think of it. We should not think that he gave up his omnipotence and became as weak as a human being that was able to be crucified. Or that he gave up his omniscience and became ignorant like a human being. The orthodox doctrine of the incarnation is that in addition to the divine nature he already had, he assumed (or added to it) an additional nature which is a human nature. It is that human nature that is spatially limited, ignorant, temporal, and so forth. These qualities are to be ascribed to the incarnate Christ with respect to which nature you are talking about. So Jesus Christ is omnipotent with respect to the divine nature; he is not omnipotent with respect to his human nature, for example.

Student: I understand that. But how do you add something to a substance and then say there is no change?

Dr. Craig: Oh, that was the question last week unfortunately. I said I agreed that that does involve a change. But that is not a change that would violate any of the ways in which God is immutable that Packer laid out. His character and his fundamental attributes all remain the same. But I think there is a change in that the second person of the Trinity once did not have a human nature, and then the second person of the Trinity did have a human nature, and ever since will have. That does seem to me to be a change, but it is the sort of change one can allow without compromising God's perfection.

Student: To sort of rephrase what you just said, the first person of the Trinity never changed, but the second person changes. He has two natures. The earlier question, God allows us to pray also to get back into the role originally assigned to Adam – caring for others. We can bow our knees and affect others to heal the land. Praying for others we are doing like bowing the knee to Christ in submission. He is changing things differently. You would say Christ shows us how we take the new covering, we can have fellowship with the divine nature and be a partaker of it. Christ humbled himself to learn obedience as you said a long time ago, yet he already knew who Bartholomew was before he met him. He has both natures but he is showing all the power is available to us – the same power that raised him will raise us. All the power in God is available to us as we kneel before Christ and let him be Lord.

Dr. Craig: OK. Good.

END DISCUSSION

To sum up midway through our study of the divine attributes, we've been looking at God's attributes in virtue of his infinite being. We've seen that God is self-existent, necessary, eternal, omnipresent, and immutable. If we want to meditate on something that will expand our minds, think on God. To return to Charles Spurgeon's words with which we began: "The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father."

God is an infinite being that stretches our mind beyond its mundane limits.

Now we want to turn to talk about God's attributes which he has in virtue of being a personal being. You will remember I said that the God of the Bible is both infinite and yet also personal. We've been looking at some of the ways in which God is infinite. In these respects, there is a great chasm between God and the rest of creation including man and the animals and plants and inorganic material. But now when we come to talking about God as personal we find man as made in the image of God as being on God's side

of the chasm. Then the rest of creation is separated from God and man in that the remaining creatures in the world are not persons in the way God and man are.⁶⁹

Many people that I've talked to don't have trouble conceiving of God as an infinite being. That seems intuitively correct. But many people have trouble thinking that God can be both infinite and personal. They seem to think that somehow personhood excludes infinity – that God cannot be personal if he is also infinite. It seems to me that that is simply an unjustified assumption. God possesses all of the attributes of personhood that we do, whether these are intellectual attributes, emotional attributes, volitional attributes. But he possesses them to an infinite degree whereas we have them only to a finite degree. In that sense these attributes are communicable. They can be shared by both God and man to different degrees. Thus man is a person fundamentally because God is personal. It is because who God is that we are also persons.

Let's take a look at the first of the attributes of God that we want to speak of in terms of his personhood. The first one is God's incorporeality. Let's look at some scriptural data pertinent to this attribute.

1. 1 John 4:24. Jesus says, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” So God is a spiritual being. He is not a physical being. He is a being which is spirit.
2. God is omnipresent. We don't need to look at these verses again but just refer back to what we already said. God is not spatially located in the way that a physical object is. Rather, God is omnipresent. That will entail his incorporeality.
3. God is indiscernible to the five senses. He cannot be perceived by the five senses. 1 Timothy 6:16, speaking of Jesus Christ, the Lord of Lords, “who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light whom no man has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.” Here God is said to be invisible. He cannot be seen and never has been seen. Also 1 Timothy 1:17 says, “To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be power and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” So God is said by the Scriptures to be invisible. I think that would encompass not merely eyesight, but also being able to feel God or smell God or use any of the other five senses to apprehend God. God is not a physical object that is discernible by the five senses.
4. The Old Testament forbids making images of God. Exodus 20:4-5a, “You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down

⁶⁹ 15:16

to them and serve them.” Here it is prohibited to make images of God that would be used in worship.⁷⁰

Look at Deuteronomy 4:15-16:

Therefore take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female.

So God is not to be portrayed in paintings, in statuary, in any sort of visual image. Any sort of image, however beautiful, however artistically inspiring, will diminish who God is by portraying him in some necessarily finite, limited, corporeal way. God is not to be pictured in any sort of way, according to the Scriptures.

5. At the same time, nevertheless, it is true that the Bible will often describe God in bodily terms. Psalms 18:6-10 gives us an example:

In my distress I called upon the Lord;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.

Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations also of the mountains trembled
and quaked, because he was angry.
Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.
He bowed the heavens, and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.
He rode on a cherub, and flew;
he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind.

Now here God is described by the psalmist in very graphic bodily terms. He has ears. He has nostrils. He is like a fire-breathing monster who rides the heavens – rides on the cherubs through the clouds. At the same time that Israel is commanded not to make images of God yet you have these very physicalistic descriptions of God in the Psalms. We might well wonder what is going on here.

6. Moreover (this is the next point), there are, in the Old Testament and throughout the Scriptures, visions of God described – so-called theophanies – where people see God. These are often in bodily terms. For example, Exodus 33:20-23. Here Moses is asking to see the glory of God. God says to him that he will show Moses his glory, but he says,

“But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live.” And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

Here God describes himself as having a face and hands and even a back that Moses can look at! God is described in very human terms here as having some sort of a body that Moses is allowed to glimpse. But Moses cannot see God's face.

What are we to make of this scriptural data? On the one hand we have the clear prohibitions against any kind of images of God, and also the affirmation that God is omnipresent, that he is spirit – not of the order of material or physical things. Yet we also have these descriptions of God in very graphic bodily terms and these theophanies – these visions of God – in terms of bodily images.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Very related to your discussion of the tension between not having an idol of God and also these images being described in the Bible, I wonder what your thoughts are in terms of where our limits should be in terms of describing God.⁷¹ For example, C. S. Lewis had him in the image of a lion in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, which was very effective showing some characteristics of him. What would be the difference between that and having an idol?

Dr. Craig: There you are talking about a literary figure that is a Christ symbol – a Christ-figure. I think that is different, at least in my opinion. I think you could have people in literature that are Christ-figures in the story but you are not violating the commandment to make images of God and portray what he is like. For example, if you've ever read Charles Dickens' wonderful novel *The Tale of Two Cities*, the hero in that novel is clearly a Christ-figure because what he does is he dies in the place of the condemned prisoner. He allows the condemned prisoner to escape and he goes to the guillotine and sacrifices his life. He is a Christ-figure. I think in the movie *Avatar* the hero Jake is a Christ-figure. He becomes incarnate as a Na'vi on this planet and he becomes the savior of that race. He is a Christ-figure. I don't see anything wrong with that because it is not meant to be a literal sort of portrayal of what God is like. These are literary symbols as it were.

⁷¹ 25:13

Student: I agree. I wonder if it would be correct to say that what God wants for us is not to create a portrayal of him that seems to be all-encapsulating that we actually direct our worship to.

Dr. Craig: That is certainly true. These prohibitions against graven images are with respect to worship in particular. You shouldn't have in your church images of God which are used in worship in any way. Aslan, whom you mention, is of course a Christ-figure. He also dies for the sake of the people to save them.

Student: Is there any distinction between God the Father and Jesus in his corporeal sense?

Dr. Craig: OK. I am inclined to think there is because when we portray Jesus in a painting or in a movie or film, we are not portraying his divine nature but his human nature and that was truly and unequivocally human. So it seems to me that there is nothing the matter with images of Jesus.

Student: But the Sistine Chapel is not a place you should go?

Dr. Craig: There you've got Adam with God the Father creating Adam and God looks like a body-builder extending his finger out to Adam. I think that as wonderful as Michelangelo's paintings are that these are a violation of these commandments against images of God.

Student: We talked about not being able to see God. You also mentioned that you didn't think that our other senses could understand him either. But I see a few different places in Scripture where it does seem like man can audibly hear God's voice like Moses at the burning bush, the calling of Samuel into service as a young boy, at Jesus' baptism, and the calling of Paul on the road to Damascus, for example. My question is: do you think that those were them hearing him directly through their spirits? Or is that a true audible thing that they heard with their ears?

Dr. Craig: It seems to me it is undeniable those were genuine auditory experiences that these people had. They heard the voice. But I guess the way I would see that is that it is not as though you actually hear God's voice, because God doesn't have any vocal cords. I would say he doesn't have a voice. He doesn't push air out through a larynx and produce a sound. Rather, what God can do is cause sound waves in the air that are then an audible voice that communicates his message to you. I think that is very, very different. What you are hearing then are these sound waves miraculously produced by an incorporeal God who doesn't himself have vocal mechanisms to have a voice.⁷²

It would be similar to the theophanies, I think, where (I am getting ahead of myself) you have this visual experience of a being on a throne or the back of God in Moses' case. I

would see these as something that God causes but you are not actually seeing him. As I say, I am getting ahead of myself.

Student: We'd have to treat Jesus as different in terms of this physical manifestation because if that weren't true then anybody who saw Jesus and lived with him would die. He walked the earth.

Dr. Craig: Yes, or it falls into the error called Docetism which is an early heresy that said that Jesus didn't really have a physical human nature but that it was just illusory. That is a heresy. We don't want to say that. We've got to affirm the physicality and corporeality of Jesus' human nature.

Student: Can you tell us a definition of how you are using the word incorporeality?

Dr. Craig: Yes, and I will get into this more next time. It is the idea that God doesn't have a body. He doesn't have a corpus. Incorporeality would mean God doesn't have a body. He is pure spirit. You, I think, according to the Bible, are a composite of body and soul. But if your body were to die and be laid in the ground your soul would become a disembodied spiritual substance. That is what God is. He is an unembodied spiritual substance. He is incorporeal. You would be incorporeal, too, once your body died. But you would be not unembodied; you'd be disembodied at that point. But again I am getting ahead of myself. These are the issues that we will get into next time when we try to make sense of this biblical data.⁷³

Lecture 11: Understanding Scriptural Descriptions of God vis-a-vis Incorporeality

In our lesson we have been thinking about the attribute of God's incorporeality, or God's not being or having a body. In our survey of the scriptural data concerning God's incorporeality we saw that God is a spirit, that God is omnipresent, that God is invisible, and that images of God as corporeal objects are forbidden. In all of these ways the Bible goes to support the idea that God is an incorporeal being, not a material or physical being.

Nevertheless, we also saw that the Scriptures are filled with anthropomorphic descriptions of God. God is described frequently in corporeal terms. The Scriptures speak of God's arms, hands, eyes, ears, and so forth. These are pervasive in Scripture. It is not simply that these bodily parts are attributed to God, but even activities like God's seeing the distress of his people or God's hearing their cry are anthropomorphic descriptions since God doesn't literally have eyeballs that receive photons and so give him visual images of things to see nor does he have eardrums on which sound waves can impinge so that he could hear things in that literal sense. The Scripture is replete with these sorts of anthropomorphic descriptions of God.

Moreover, we also saw that people sometimes experienced visions of God which are corporeal in nature. These are called theophanies. They are visions of God. In these, God is usually seen in some sort of corporeal form, perhaps sitting on a throne for example.

So we've got scriptural data that on the one hand clearly implies and says that God is a spiritual being – an incorporeal being. Yet you have these corporeal descriptions of God in the Bible, and you also have these visionary experiences of God as a corporeal being. So how should we make sense of this material?

I think that the data that we surveyed demand that we think of God as incorporeal, as immaterial, non-physical. There is simply no way of getting around those clear biblical passages that indicate that God transcends matter and energy and has created all the material things there are. So he is not himself a material object that has a body. How do we understand then these anthropomorphic descriptions of God and these theophanies of God in corporeal terms? I would say that the corporeal descriptions of God in the Bible are metaphorical, not literal. They are metaphors. They are not to be taken literally. I would give two arguments in support of this interpretation.

1. *These descriptions serve a clear literary purpose.* For example, when the Scriptures speak of the arm of the Lord, they are talking about God's power. When they speak of God's eyes, they are talking about God's being all-knowing. When the Scriptures speak of God's ears, it is talking about his attentiveness to certain persons. All of these

corporeal descriptions have a literary purpose. In the *New Bible Dictionary* article on the word “face” this is especially well-described. This is how the *New Bible Dictionary* treats the term “face” when it is ascribed to God.

The Hebrew word is used in many English senses. The face of a person became synonymous with his presence.

So it didn’t necessarily mean the physical face – the nose, and the lips, and the eyes.⁷⁴ Rather, it became synonymous with that person’s presence.

Metaphorically, determination could be shown by “setting one’s face.” Determined opposition was made by “withstanding someone to his face.” Intimacy and understanding were conveyed by the phrase “face-to-face.” This phrase has, of course, passed into English, as has also the expression “his face fell.”

Obviously, such expressions are not to be understood literally. It would be inept to think that the expression “his face fell” meant that his face dropped to the ground somehow. Rather, it expressed his being disheartened or disappointed in something.

The *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* also says with respect to God’s face:

Applied to God, it denotes his presence. In such phrases as “seeing the face of the Lord” or “the face of the Lord is set against them that do evil” or “their cry came before the face of the Lord” it is evidently all one with God’s manifested presence.

So a correct reading of the Scriptures to understand these expressions I think makes clear their literary purpose and hence their metaphorical rather than literal nature.

A good example of this is in 1 Peter 3:12: “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those that do evil.” Clearly, it would be inept to try to interpret those passages literally; that somehow the eyeballs of God are sitting on top of the righteous people or that the face of the Lord is up against those that do evil. Clearly the eyes and the ears and the face of the Lord here are meant as literary figures of speech.

2. The second reason I think that we should understand these expressions to be metaphorical is that *if you take them literally then they would be inconsistent with each other because God is differently described in these anthropomorphic categories*. In some passages, God would be a fire-breathing winged monster which is surely not the way we are to understand God.

Moreover, we could ask the question, if we take them literally, then where is God? If God is a physical body, where is he? According to the Scriptures God fills heaven and Earth. Therefore he cannot be in any physical place. He cannot be somewhere. He cannot be a physical body.

Therefore I think it is obvious that we should understand these anthropomorphic descriptions of God in a metaphorical way rather than a literal way.

What then about the theophanies – the visions of God in corporeal terms? I think that we should understand these visions to be mental projections of the percipient's mind. It is not as though he is seeing something external to his mind. Rather, God, in giving him a vision, has caused him to project a mental image. It is a projection of his own mind and therefore not something that is to be taken literally as real.

Visions of this sort are very common in the Bible. Let's just look at the book of Acts to see several examples of New Testament visions of this sort. First, Acts 10:10-16. What we have described here is Peter's vision of a sheet being lowered from heaven that is filled with various kinds of animals. It says in Acts 10:10:

And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance [so this was an entranced state⁷⁵] and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

Here I think it is very evident again that this is not a literal seeing of a sheet full of animals in the external world that other people passing by Peter's house would have seen coming down from heaven. Peter was in a trance, it says, when he saw this. Therefore, we should not think that this is a huge tarpaulin of some sort filled with all of these clean and unclean animals bumping into each other and trying to maintain their balance in this sheet being raised up and down. This is a mental projection that God has caused Peter to have to teach him a lesson about clean and unclean, preparing him for proclaiming the Gospel to Cornelius and his household who would be regarded as unclean (as non-Jewish, as Gentile) and therefore not worthy to receive the Gospel. So God is giving him this vision to prepare for his proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Turn back to Acts 7 for another example. Acts 7:55-57. This is Stephen's vision of the exalted Christ as the Son of Man at his stoning. It says in Acts 7:55:

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. [And he was stoned.]

Again, this was a purely private vision that Stephen alone had. The people standing around saw nothing. Stephen had this himself. Its non-literal nature is also evident in that he sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, which is itself an anthropomorphic description of God that serves a literary purpose. That is why this vision is not counted among the resurrection appearances of Christ. This was not a resurrection appearance story. This was a visionary story. It was a vision of the exalted Christ that Stephen had that God caused Stephen to project.

Another example in the book of Acts comes in chapter 16. Acts 16:9-10. This is Paul's famous Macedonian call to come and preach the Gospel in Macedonia. It says in Acts 16:9:

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Here, again, God causes Paul to have this vision of a man in Macedonia inviting them to come and preach the Gospel there. It is a visionary seeing.

Finally, Acts 22:17-18. Here Paul is recounting his experience of coming to faith in Christ. After his baptism he says in Acts 22:17: "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'" Here Paul is, again, in an entranced state, and he has a vision of Jesus warning him to get out of the city.⁷⁶ This is not a resurrection appearance again. This is not a bodily corporeal appearance of Christ. This is an entranced vision of Christ which Paul has that serves the purpose of warning him to get out of Jerusalem.

These kinds of visions are well known, I think, in the Bible. When we read these stories of theophanies – seeing God – these are visionary experiences, mental projections of the percipient, that God causes them to have in order to teach them some significant lesson.

These theophanies of God serve the purpose of manifesting God's glory. Look at Exodus 33:18. This is the story we read in our last lesson of Moses' asking to see God and God granting him a sort of diminished vision of God's glory and goodness. This is in Exodus 33:18: "Moses said, 'I pray thee, show me thy glory.'" Then God says, *I will do so but you shall not see my face; you will only see my back.* And he gives him a diminished vision of the glory of God. This serves the purpose of manifesting God's glory to the percipient. Compare what the author of the book of Hebrews says about Moses' experience in Hebrews 11:27. Speaking of Moses it says, "By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible." That is an interesting expression, isn't it? God is invisible, the author of Hebrews affirms. He cannot be seen. But Moses endured as seeing him who is invisible. He had had this vision of God. He was strengthened and was therefore able to endure as though he had seen God himself who cannot be seen because he is invisible.

Another example would be Isaiah 6:1-3 where Isaiah sees God in his glory in the temple:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

Here, again, God's holiness is manifested in this corporeal vision of God upon a throne that Isaiah receives. It is a manifestation of God's holiness that causes then, of course, Isaiah to feel conviction of his own sin and inadequacy.

Finally, for a New Testament example, look at Revelation 4. The whole chapter here is a vivid vision of God in the throne room. We won't read the whole chapter but as you look at Revelation 4 you see that he sees a throne in heaven and he sees someone sitting on the throne. This person, he says, appeared like jasper and carnelian and around the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald. So this person looked like a sort of mineral object as though it were a person that was made out of some kind of precious mineral that reflected the light. "From the throne issue flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder" and so forth. Then around the throne are these creatures full of eyes in front and behind. They had these strange appearances.⁷⁷ These living creatures then fall down before the throne and they cry "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Then they describe how the elders cast their crowns before the throne singing "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for

thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created.” Here you have a vision that John has of God on his throne described in corporeal terms, very vivid with all of these strange creatures and so forth. This serves to declare the glory of God – his holiness and his greatness as the creator of all things. These theophanies serve the purpose of manifesting God’s glory and holiness and greatness to those who receive them.

So I think that we are not to understand these visions literally. The whole book of Revelation in particular is just full of these sorts of images. Think of the lamb that is full of eyes all over him slain before the foundation of the world. These other sorts of creatures and monsters and so forth. The whole book is just replete with rich imagery that shouldn’t be understood in a literal way. Particularly, the idea of God’s throne is not something that should be thought of as a physical object upon which a humanoid being sits. The *New Bible Dictionary* says that the throne of God symbolizes dignity and authority. The one who sits upon the throne is the one who is invested with dignity and divine authority. Similarly, to be at the right hand of the person on the throne doesn’t mean to be seated literally at this person’s hand, but that is a position also of authority and dignity. Again we see the literary purpose that is served in these visions of God.

START DISCUSSION

Student: All of those examples you gave are pretty obvious it seems to be acceptable as a vision type of situation in one person’s observation. But as we look at Genesis 18 starting in verse 1, “And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him.” It goes on to say that he wanted to bring food to them. Sarah, obviously viewed this. There were other people involved in seeing this. He is called the Lord. At least in the commentaries that I’ve read seem to think that that is Jehovah God. That is what is claimed in some of the commentaries.

Dr. Craig: I would not call this a theophany. I think you are right. It seems to me that here you have a corporeal manifestation of God or the angel of the Lord to Abraham. You are right. This is an example that I would not see as being some sort of visionary experience. But in some way God has manifested himself in a physical way to Abraham.

Student: Just a follow up on that, some people see that as the preincarnate Christ. Could that be?

Dr. Craig: That is often said, and I think perhaps the motivation there is that we know that the second person of the Trinity does acquire a human body at some point. So seeing these corporeal descriptions of God earlier on makes them infer that this could be Christ in some sort of preincarnate state becoming incarnate. I am uncomfortable with that. I don’t see any textual ground for saying that. A Jew reading this passage wouldn’t have

understood it that way. That is not the way the author would have understood it. It also would mean that Christ doesn't become incarnate then in virtue of the virginal conception by Mary which, it seems to me, we want to hold on to. That is when the second person of the Trinity assumes a human nature – at the virginal conception, and not earlier.⁷⁸ I am more inclined to say that these were either angelic beings like the angel of the Lord which is so closely identified with God that he stands in God's place or, as I said, perhaps as some kind of corporeal manifestation of God, but not literally Christ in his human nature. I would feel uncomfortable about that.

Student: You may be right about the throne of God being a totally fictional representation for the benefit of the beholder, however, there are five throne chapters – Revelation 4, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1 and 10, and Daniel 7. We must realize that these are over a wide period of time and widely different observers, and yet the descriptions are very, very similar. I think there is maybe a non-trivial probability that this may actually (when we get up there) we may see something like that.

Dr. Craig: Ah! Now, I wouldn't want to exclude that – that we might have visual theophanies ourselves in heaven. But what I am wanting to suggest is that these passages are, in fact, what I said – they are visionary experiences and not to be taken as literal, that there is a kind of literal chair having dimensions and so forth that God sits on. Certainly the idea of God's throne is common because that is God's authority and where the sovereign king sits. I haven't looked at the other passages you mentioned. We looked at the Isaiah passage and the one in Revelation 4. In both of those it does seem to be visionary in nature and not literal. But I wouldn't exclude that we could have visions ourselves in heaven.

Student: I am just saying that these almost outrageous creatures that are described by various observers – in other words, if it is purely a vision, he has given almost exactly the same vision to these individuals over a period of time. I am just saying it is a possibility that may represent something that actually is in heaven.

Dr. Craig: Yeah, I think we'd have to say that is a possibility.

Student: Inspired from that last question, I would be really interested to hear what you would think in terms of what our experience with God will be in relation to when we are in heaven with him in relation to the fact that we will have heavenly bodies that are physical and that our experience of God will be it seems like we have these metaphors of experiencing God in a physical way like the throne of what you are talking about. How that would sort of change the way that we relate to God and what his purpose behind that would be.

Dr. Craig: This is a really difficult question because so little is said about it in the Bible. The one verse says, “Eye has not seen nor is the mind of man conceived what God has in store for those who love him, for those who are his.” But we do know it will be a corporeal existence for us and that Christ will be there in a corporeal way, too. He takes his resurrection body with him on the ascension. It will be a corporeal existence. A new heavens and a new Earth. I take it that our hope for immortality is going to be one that will be a physical existence, but with superhuman powers such as we saw in Christ’s resurrection body that we can’t even imagine yet. So we don’t really know. How will God be manifested in the new heavens and the new Earth? It is difficult to say. Will there be, as someone said earlier, perhaps some sort of visionary seeing of God? Or will Christ be present among us and that will be enough? I don’t know. We just know that it will be a wonderful, blissful state of communion with God free from sin and evil and every sort of deficit of finite existence, and so a wonderful hope but far beyond probably anything that we can hope to imagine ourselves.

Student: I know that is a tough question.

Dr. Craig: Yeah, but a good one, and it is one to contemplate in the sense of thinking how wonderful it will be.

END DISCUSSION

That brings us to the end of our lesson.⁷⁹

Lecture 12: Practical Application of God's Incorporeality / God's Omniscience

We've been talking about divine incorporeality, that is to say that God is not a material body but rather is spiritual. We come now to some practical application of this attribute to our lives. What practical difference does it make (or ought it to make) that God is incorporeal? Three things come to mind.

1. Most fundamentally, it means that *that which is ultimate is not material*. The importance of this, I think, is hard to overestimate. That which is ultimate in life is not material. Rather, ultimate reality is spiritual, specifically personal. God is a personal spiritual being. So ultimate reality is personal and spiritual.

What that implies therefore is that the locus of value is persons. Value is invested principally in persons, whether these be divine persons of the Godhead or human persons created in his image. By contrast, things have value only in relationship to persons. This is the distinction between something's having intrinsic versus extrinsic value. Persons have intrinsic value. That is to say, they are ends in themselves. They are intrinsically valuable in and of themselves. Things have only extrinsic value insofar as they serve the ends of persons. So, for example, a person is intrinsically valuable created in God's image – a person. It doesn't matter how gifted that person is, how useful he is to society. That person is intrinsically valuable simply because he is a person. By contrast a material thing like a whiteboard or a podium or a hammer has extrinsic value in that they serve purposes of human beings and therefore have a value insofar as they serve us. But if there were no human persons in existence these things would have no value. Their extrinsic value would simply evaporate. Therefore, persons are the locus of value. They have intrinsic value as opposed to mere extrinsic value.

Think of what that implies. That means that one person is worth more than the entire material universe put together. You are worth more in God's sight than the rest of the entire material universe taken together. What an incredible thought.

How ought we to conduct ourselves in life? It means that we need to love people and use things, not vice versa. Of course the temptation for us sinful persons is to love things and use people. That is an utter inversion of the proper order of things. Rather, we ought to love persons as intrinsically valuable and use things which have extrinsic value, but not to use people for our ends and to devote our lives to loving things. What are the two greatest commandments that God has given in Scripture? They are to love the Lord your God with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your might, and to love your neighbor as yourself. It is loving persons (whether divine or human) that comprise the whole moral duty of man.

This fact that God is incorporeal, that ultimate reality is spiritual, I think is revolutionary and ought to affect the way we live in a very fundamental way. That leads to my second point of application.

2. It implies that therefore *we ought to have a spiritual focus in life and not a material focus*. Our focus in life should be spiritual rather than material.⁸⁰ Look at Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:19-21. I think these ought to be the theme for all of us as Christians. Jesus says,

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Our focus should not be on these material things but rather on spiritual things. That will then guide our lives. So in Matthew 6:33 Jesus sums it up by saying, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well." Our primary focus in life should be on seeking the Kingdom of God and the righteousness that belongs to it, and then to trust God for our material needs.

The author C. P. Snow once remarked that the worst thing that could happen in the world would not be worldwide famine. He said the worst thing that could happen in the world would be there would be worldwide famine and we in the West would watch it on television. That remark, I think, is very convicting. When you think of the material prosperity that we enjoy, we need to ask ourselves, "Are we focusing on material prosperity and accumulating goods, or are we doing what Jesus said – laying up treasures in heaven rather than these transitory things?" Where are our hearts? They need to be not on material things but on spiritual things and on the Kingdom of God.

3. This implies that *our most important needs are not physical but rather are spiritual*. Paul gave the following advice to his disciple Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:7b-8. He said to Timothy, "Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." Here Paul doesn't say that bodily exercise has no value, but what he does say is that compared to godliness bodily exercise or bodily training is of secondary importance. Bodily exercise, being fit and healthy, holds promise for this life, but godliness, he says, has promise not only for this life but for the life to come which will be everlasting life. So we need to train ourselves in godliness.

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 9:25 Paul makes this athletic comparison: "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath [an Olympic

wreath, a garland], but we are imperishable.” We train ourselves in godliness because we have an imperishable reward in the life to come. Now think of how much time we lavish upon our physical bodies. Working out. Trying to eat right. The whole cosmetics industry – millions and millions of dollars invested in cosmetics. Hair salons and hair treatment. We do so much to try to make our physical body in appearance to be all that we would like it to be. But how much time by comparison do we spend on our soul? On nurturing our spiritual self, our spiritual lives?⁸¹ Do we exercise this same sort of rigor and discipline that the athlete does in his bodily training when it comes to training our souls in Bible study, in prayer, in corporate worship, in other spiritual disciplines? I think that we need to remind ourselves that ultimately our most important needs are not our physical needs. We shouldn't neglect those, but nevertheless we need to attend to our spiritual needs and the nurture and care of our souls because this is going to have promise for the life to come.

So I think you can see the fact that God is spirit and not corporeal is just a fundamental factor in the Christian world and life view and ought to impact how we live.

As spirit, as self-conscious mind, God possesses all of the attributes of personhood – intellectual attributes, emotional attributes, volitional attributes – but to an infinite degree. We now want to turn to a study of some of those personal attributes that God has.

The first of God's personal attributes is his intellectual attributes. That is to say, God's omniscience. The omniscience of God is his attribute of being all-knowing. The word “omniscience” comes from the Latin words *omni* (which means “all”) plus *scientia* (which means “knowledge”). We obviously get our word “science” from that Latin word, but the word means knowledge, not simply science. *Omni-scientia* – God has all knowledge. That is what it is to be omniscient. Let's first look at some of the scriptural data about this attribute of omniscience.

First, I want to read Psalm 139:1-6 as a wonderful exposition of the omniscience of God. The psalmist writes:

O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me!
Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up;
thou discernest my thoughts from afar.
Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
and art acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
Thou dost beset me behind and before,

and layest thy hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high, I cannot attain it.

Here the psalmist gives a wonderful description or poetic account of God's omniscience. Let's look specifically at some of the things that God knows in virtue of being omniscient.

First of all, God knows everything that happens. God knows everything that is going on. Job 28:24 says, "he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens." Here it portrays God as surveying the Earth and he sees everything that is going on. He is aware of everything. Turning over to Job 31:4 the author asks, "Does he not see my ways, and number all my steps?" Of course the answer is yes, God knows every step that he takes and sees all of his ways. God knows everything that is going on. Turn a couple chapters more to Job 34:21-22: "For his eyes are upon the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps. There is no gloom or deep darkness where evildoers may hide themselves."⁸² Here there is nothing that is undisclosed to God. He sees everything that is happening.

This same truth can be found in Proverbs 15:3: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." This is an expression as it were of the omnipresence of God as well.

Finally, this same truth is taught in the New Testament in Matthew 10:29-30. Here Jesus is speaking and asks, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered." Jesus is emphasizing here that God knows the tiniest details about you – even the number of hairs on your head are known to God.

So God knows all things that happen in the world. Not only that, but God knows the secret thoughts of every individual. He not only sees what is happening everywhere in the world, but he knows the secret thoughts of every person. That is to say, God reads your mind. 1 Chronicles 28:9. This is David's instruction to Solomon.

And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father, and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every plan and thought.

So God searches the hearts and he understands every person's thoughts.

Similarly, in Psalm 44:21. We don't need to turn to it, but I'll just focus on the phrase there that God knows "the secrets of the heart."

Then in Jeremiah 17:9-10:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? [Then here comes the answer from God.] “I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.”

So God searches and knows people’s hearts. Again, this same truth is reaffirmed in the New Testament. For example, in the book of Hebrews 4:13 it says, “And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” So there are no secrets from God. He even reads your mind. He knows the depths of your heart and your inner motives. As the author of Hebrews said, it is as though you are naked and laid bare to the eyes of God even in your innermost thoughts.

Thirdly, even more remarkably perhaps, the Scriptures affirm that God knows the future. We’ve already seen this affirmed in Psalm 139. Let’s go back and look at that again, verse 4 in particular: “Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.” So even before you speak the words that you speak, God already knows them before you utter them.⁸³

Also in Psalm 139:14b-16,

Thou knowest me right well;
my frame was not hidden from thee,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.
Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance;
in thy book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

Here the psalmist affirms that even as you were being formed in the womb and had not yet been born, all of the days of your life were already written in God’s book. All of the days that you would live – from the day of your birth to the day of your death – God knows them. They are in his book so to speak.

So God knows the future. This knowledge of the future was thought by Jewish prophets to be one of the distinguishing marks of the true God of Israel from the false gods of Israel’s neighbors. In contrast to the God of Israel, the true God, the pagan gods could not tell the future. They did not know the future. This exposed them as false deities. Look at Isaiah 41:21-24. Here is the challenge that Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel, issues to these pagan pretenders.

Set forth your case, says the Lord;
bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob.
Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen.
Tell us the former things, what they are,
that we may consider them,
that we may know their outcome;
or declare to us the things to come.
Tell us what is to come hereafter,
that we may know that you are gods;
do good, or do harm,
that we may be dismayed and terrified.
Behold, you are nothing,
and your work is nought;
an abomination is he who chooses you.

Here God makes his deity to stand or fall on his foreknowledge of the future. The God of Israel knows the future, and therefore is the true God. The gods of Israel's neighbors cannot foretell the future and therefore are false gods. So God makes his deity stand or fall upon his ability to foretell the future.

Also look over at Isaiah 46:9b-10 where God says in verse 9: "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'" The God of Israel, the God of the Old Testament, is a God who completely knows the future, even the very words that you are going to speak before you speak them. That is why the God of the Bible is a God of prophecy. Over and over again we find prophecies of highly contingent events that could not have been predicted by the causal factors that were present at the time the predictions were given.

This, of course, then carries on into the New Testament where you have Jesus, the Son of God, exercising his role as a prophet in predicting not only his Second Coming and the signs of the end times but also highly contingent events like Peter's denying him three times before the cock crows twice, or Judas' betrayal of him. The Bible, I think, is clear in affirming God's foreknowledge of the future.

Finally, the fourth point is God cannot learn anything. In Romans 11:33-36, Paul gives a doxology to God in which he refers to the excellence of God's knowledge.⁸⁴ Paul exclaims,

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever.
Amen.

Here Paul extols the unsearchable depths of God’s understanding and knowledge.

Similarly, in the Old Testament in the book of Job we have God’s understanding extolled. Job 21:22 asks, “Will any teach God knowledge, seeing that he judges those that are on high?” The obvious implied answer is no. No one can teach God knowledge because God already has knowledge that is perfect. In Job 37:16 it refers to God as the one who is perfect in knowledge and therefore cannot be instructed or learn anything.

Psalm 147:5 is our final verse that we want to look at. It says, “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.” God’s understanding is infinite. It cannot be compassed. It is beyond measure.

The scriptural data on God’s omniscience is astonishing in the greatness of God’s intellectual powers. God knows all things, everything that happens. God knows the secret thoughts of every individual. God even knows the future. God has immeasurable, perfect knowledge such that he cannot learn anything because he is perfect in knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Student: Those Isaiah verses 46 and 45 are good texts if you are encountering a Mormon because they refer to God being the only God, there are none before and none after.

Dr. Craig: Yes. Isaiah has a very lofty concept of God in many ways.

Student: In 45:5 – “I am Lord, there is no other. Apart from me there is no other.” That goes along with the 46 verse that you mentioned. Those are awfully good texts for someone who thinks they are going to be God or there are other gods.

Dr. Craig: What he is thinking of is in Mormon theology, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Days Saints, they believe in polytheism. It is a very crude, materialistic form of polytheism where God is a sort of humanoid material individual who lives on a planet in outer space and is lord over this universe. Some day, if we live correctly, we, too, will become gods and sire children that can go on to become gods as well. You are right. This is one of the most bizarre religious groups that has ever sprung out of American soil, and I think contradicts clearly the monotheistic teaching of Old Testament Judaism.

Student: In my reading of philosophical theology, my understanding is that there are quite a few people who doubt that God has middle knowledge. I am aware of the Scripture in favor of that doctrine, but in light of the scriptures that you just went over why is there this doubt that God has middle knowledge if God is omniscient? It seems like it would be a necessary component of omniscience.⁸⁵

Dr. Craig: All right. Let's talk about this because I did not actually read any verses as proof texts of what is called "middle knowledge." Middle knowledge, or in the Latin *scientia media*, is a type of knowledge. It was a theory developed especially by a Jesuit counter-Reformer named Louis Molina. What *scientia media* holds is that God not only knows everything that could happen, he not only knows all the possibilities, and he not only knows everything that will happen (all the things that will take place), but he also knows everything that *would* happen under other circumstances. This is a very different kind of knowledge than foreknowledge. This is not knowledge of the future.

The things that God knows via middle knowledge may never come to pass. It is knowledge, if I can use this terminology, of subjunctive conditional statements. A subjunctive conditional is an if-then statement in the subjunctive mood. We don't, as native English speakers, do a very good job of using the subjunctive mood. Most of us probably have no idea what it is if we remember it from our high school English classes. But the subjunctive mood is a mood that is used to express contrary-to-fact situations like "if I were rich I would buy a Mercedes." I am not rich! And I haven't bought and will not buy a Mercedes. But a subjunctive conditional would say in the subjunctive mood "if I were rich then I would buy a Mercedes" for example. These subjunctive conditionals are very, very different from indicative conditionals. Indicative conditionals are conditionals in the ordinary indicative mood. Here is a wonderful example to illustrate the contrast. Consider the indicative conditional: "If Oswald did not shoot Kennedy, somebody else did." I am sure every one of us would agree with the truth of that indicative conditional because we all know Kennedy was assassinated. So if Oswald didn't shoot him, somebody did. So that indicative conditional is clearly true. If Oswald didn't shoot Kennedy, somebody else did. But now consider the subjunctive conditional: "If Oswald had not shot Kennedy, somebody else would have." Is that true? Well, that is not at all obviously true unless you are a conspiracy theorist and you think there was another gunman on the grassy knoll or something of that sort. I think most of us would say that conditional is not true that if Oswald had not shot Kennedy somebody else would have. You can see there is a huge difference between these subjunctive conditionals and indicative conditionals.

The theory of middle knowledge is that God knows the truth of all of these subjunctive conditionals like “If Mike had been the Roman prefect of first century Palestine he would have sent Jesus to the cross. He would have done what Pilate did.” Or, “If you had been in ancient Israel, you would have been a Jewish monotheist.” Those are the sorts of things that God is said to know by means of his middle knowledge.

As indicated, the subject of God’s middle knowledge is a subject of huge controversy among theologians because although it is fairly easy to provide prooftexts of God’s foreknowledge (that is his knowledge of what *will* happen) it is not quite so easy to provide prooftexts that God has middle knowledge. One of the Molinist’s famous prooftexts is the story in the Old Testament when David is fleeing from King Saul and he goes down to a city called Keilah.⁸⁶ He ensconces himself at Keilah.⁸⁷ They have there a kind of divining instrument called an ephod which they could use to foretell the future. And so David has the priest to use the ephod to answer the question, *If I remain in Keilah, will Saul come down to attack?* The ephod says, *Yes, Saul will come down and attack.* So David asks then the next question, *If Saul comes down to attack, will the men of Keilah turn me over to Saul?* And the ephod says, *Yes, the men of Keilah will turn you over to Saul.* Whereupon David flees the city so that Saul doesn’t come down and the men of Keilah don’t turn him over. What the Molinists pointed out was clearly the ephod was not giving him foreknowledge of the future. It wasn’t telling him what will happen because we know those things didn’t happen. Saul didn’t attack the city. David didn’t stay there. And the men of Keilah didn’t turn him over. Rather, what it was giving him was knowledge of these subjunctive conditionals. If you *were* to remain in Keilah, Saul *would* attack the city. If Saul *were* to attack the city, the men of Keilah *would* turn you over to him. Knowing that then David flees. This was one of the proof texts that Molinists would use to show that God in fact does have middle knowledge.

We will talk about this later, but at this point I simply had not thought to bring it up because it is so controversial. We will talk about it some more later on as to whether God has this kind of knowledge.

Let me just say this. I think that it is difficult through these kinds of stories to prove that God has middle knowledge because the doctrine of middle knowledge requires that God has this sort of knowledge logically prior to his decision to create any world. He uses this middle knowledge to create a certain world. These stories are about what is going on in this world rather than God’s status logically prior to his decision to create a world. So even Reformed theologians and other theologians would agree that God has knowledge of these subjunctive conditionals. Until modern times, it really wasn’t a matter of

86 cf. 1 Samuel 23:9-12

87 35:13

controversy whether God had knowledge of subjunctive conditionals. Of course he did. Everyone agreed that he did. The dispute was when does he have this knowledge? Does he have it prior to his decision to create a world? Or does he have it only after his decision to create a world? That question is one for theological reflection. It is not one that you can just proof-text, I think. For that reason I haven't brought it up. But now we have had a fairly nice discussion as a result of your question of what middle knowledge is, how it goes beyond even foreknowledge, and what scriptural warrant has usually been given for it.

Student: I know that this example doesn't prove that he had knowledge of this before the world was created, but what about the example in Esther where Mordecai tells Esther, *If you don't act, do you think that God will not accomplish his purpose through another?*

Dr. Craig: Hmm. That is an interesting verse. I've never heard that one used before as a proof-text, but yes, Mordecai does seem to think there that God would know how to do this. Maybe that could just be a verse indicating God's power. That if you don't do this, God has the power to get somebody else. It might not necessarily indicate middle knowledge that there is somebody else who would do it. It is probably more reflective of God's power, I think, to use someone else. But there are other scriptural verses.⁸⁸ For example, when Jesus pronounces the woes upon Bethsaida and Chorazin.⁸⁹ He says, "If the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented in sack clothes and ashes." Molinists use that as a proof-text for middle knowledge. God knew what the people in Tyre and Sidon would have done if they had seen the miracles that the people in Bethsaida and Chorazin did see.

Student: Just a couple of quick examples pop into mind. The story of Jonah is one, and then Balaam's donkey. The angel said if she wouldn't have stopped *I surely would have killed you*. This is an extension of God's . . .

Dr. Craig: Yeah, that would be a subjunctive conditional as well.

END DISCUSSION

I think we've already begun to see how provocative and interesting this attribute of God can be. Indeed, the omniscience of God is one of the most discussed of the attributes of God. When we meet together next time we will begin to unfold the richness of this doctrine.⁹⁰

88 39:56

89 cf. Matthew 11:20-22

90 Total Running Time: 41:52 (Copyright © 2015 William Lane Craig)

Lecture 13: God Is More Than Omniscient

We have been talking about the scriptural data concerning God's omniscience or his attribute of being all-knowing. As a result of the question time last week I realized that I had omitted an important part of the scriptural data concerning divine omniscience, so I want to add that and read a couple of passages that are pertinent to it.

This would be, if you will, a fifth point under the scriptural data and that is that God knows what would happen under different circumstances. God not only knows everything that is happening, everything that has happened and will happen, but he also knows even what would happen under different circumstances.

One of the classic passages illustrating this is found in 1 Samuel 23:1-13. This is the story of David at Keilah.

Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and are robbing the threshing floors." Therefore David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the Lord said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah." But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" Then David inquired of the Lord again. And the Lord answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will give the Philistines into your hand." And David and his men went to Keilah, and fought with the Philistines, and brought away their cattle, and made a great slaughter among them. So David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah.

When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, he came down with an ephod in his hand. [This is a sort of divining device to inquire of the Lord.] Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. And Saul said, "God has given him into my hand; for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars." And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men.

David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." Then said David, "O Lord, the God of Israel, thy servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as thy servant has heard? O Lord, the God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant." And the Lord said, "He will come down." Then said David, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the Lord said, "They will surrender you."

Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition.

So what the ephod said did not, in fact, come to pass. Saul did not come down to Keilah, and so the men of Keilah did not surrender David over to Saul. The ephod was probably a device that yielded either just a “yes” or “no” answer and so answered in such a way that it told David what would happen if David were to remain in the city. If he were to remain there then Saul would come down. And if he were to come down and attack the city the men of Keilah would surrender David over to Saul. This is an example of where God knew not only what will happen (namely, Saul will not come down), but he knew what would happen under different circumstances.

In a case like this the conditions or the circumstances did not eventuate so that the subjunctive conditional that is involved here – If David were to remain at Keilah, Saul would come down – has a false antecedent. David did not remain at Keilah. These types of subjunctive conditionals are often called counterfactuals.⁹¹ A counterfactual is a subjunctive conditional statement with a false antecedent like “If I were you, I would apply to study at Kennesaw State” or something like that. I am not you! But if I were you, that is what I would do. That is a counterfactual statement.

Unfortunately, as I mentioned last week, we native English speakers don’t have a very good handle on the subjunctive mood. We often misstate it or speak ungrammatically. Very often people will use the simple singular past-tense: “If I was you then I would do this.” That is completely incorrect. “If I was you” meant that if at some time in the past I was you then this is what I would do. Or if I said, “If I was rich, I would buy a Mercedes.” That means if at some time in the past I was once rich then I would buy a Mercedes. That is not what is meant. Rather, the correct use of the subjunctive mood involves the use of the word “were.” “If I were rich, I would buy a Mercedes.” “If I were you, I would study at Kennesaw State.”

So the easiest way to remember how to use these subjunctive conditionals would be in the if-clause, say “If it were the case that . . . then it would be the case that something else.” That is the easiest way to express these. “If it were the case that (something) then it would be the case that (something else).” So if it were the case that I were you then it would be the case that I would study at KSU, or something of that sort.

However, not all of these subjunctive conditionals have false antecedents. Sometimes the antecedent might turn out to be true. So let’s look for an example of this in the New Testament, in John 21:6. This is the story of the miraculous catch of fish where the

⁹¹ 5:03

disciples had fished all night and had caught nothing. Then Jesus comes to them and in John 21:6, “He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish.” What did Jesus know here? He knew that if they were to cast the net on the right side of the boat then they would have a great catch. So he tells them, *do it – cast it on the right side and you’ll get a great catch*. Because he knew if they were to do that then they would catch these fish. In this case, they obeyed his command, so it is not a counterfactual. It turns out that the antecedent of this is true. If you were to cast the net on the right side of the boat then you would catch the fish. They do cast it on the right side of the boat, and they do catch the fish.

Here you would have a subjunctive conditional that isn’t a counterfactual strictly speaking because it has a true antecedent. Sometimes we call these deliberative conditionals, not counterfactual conditions, because we often use these in decision making. For example, “If I were to pull out into traffic now, I would make it.” Or, “If I were to ask the boss for a raise, he would tear my head off.” We use these kinds of subjunctive conditionals in deliberation about what to do. Sometimes they may then have true antecedents if we think that the consequence would be good. If I were to quit smoking, my breath would smell better, and so I decide to quit smoking. The antecedent then is true.

The point is that there are these true subjunctive conditionals. Scripture gives examples of where God evidently knows the truth of these. He knew what would happen under these different circumstances. That needs to be included in the scriptural data concerning God’s being all-knowing, however we in the end understand it.

With that in mind, we want to turn to a systematic summary of this data concerning God’s omniscience in the Scriptures. The attribute of God’s omniscience is one of the most discussed and most fascinating of all of the various attributes of God.

Omniscience is usually defined in terms of truth.⁹² That is to say, for any true statement or any true proposition, God believes and knows that proposition, and he doesn’t believe any false propositions. We could say this: for any proposition *p*, God knows that *p* (you can fill in whatever you want for that proposition *p* – that Obama is the President of the United States, that Bryant Wright preached this morning at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, that this tree has fake green leaves on it, any proposition you want to fill in for *p*), and does not believe *not-p*. For any true proposition *p*, God knows that *p* and does not believe *not-p*. In other words, omniscience means that God knows only and all truths. He knows all the truths there are, and he doesn’t believe any falsehoods. That is the way omniscience is usually defined.

⁹² 10:02

So God knows all past-, present-, and future-tense truths, even before the foundations of the world. Before he created the world, God foreknew the motion of every subatomic particle that would occur in the history of the universe. He knew your very thoughts before you think them. He knows our free choices before we make them. He even knew what we would do under different circumstances than the ones that we will be in. So for any true proposition, God knows that proposition and does not believe the negation of it.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Belief is faith right?

Dr. Craig: Not in this context. I am glad you mentioned that. When we talk about belief in this context, we mean just having a certain attitude toward a proposition. So, for example, I believe that I am Bill Craig. I believe that I am in this room. I believe that I am married to Jan. None of those things is by faith. Believing something in this context just means affirming it or asserting it. So to believe a proposition p is to accept or affirm or assert p . That is often confused because the word “belief” for some people is synonymous with having faith, and that is not the way it is being used here. Good clarification.

END DISCUSSION

God, then, is omniscient. He knows all truths. He doesn't believe any falsehoods. This would be an incredible enough attribute for God to possess. But even omniscience does not exhaust the scope and the excellence of God's knowledge. Philosophers have noted that there is a different kind of knowledge than just propositional knowledge. In addition to knowledge of true propositions, there is also a kind of knowledge which is non-propositional in nature.

Let me try to illustrate this as best I can. Suppose I am visiting Canada and I am chased up a tree by a ferocious moose. While I am in the tree hanging on for dear life I say to you, “Go and tell Jan that I've been treed by a moose!” What do you do? You run up to Jan and do you say to her, “I've been treed by a moose!”? No! You would say “Bill has been treed by a moose.” You would communicate to her the information that I wanted you to communicate by using different words than I used. I told you to tell her that “I've been treed by a moose.” But you go and say to her, “Bill has been treed by a moose.” In other words, the proposition that you are expressing is the same one that I was expressing but we used different words. We used different words to give the same information content.⁹³ When I say “I've been treed by a moose” I express the same proposition that you do when you say “Bill has been treed by a moose.” We both have the same propositional knowledge in this case; namely, that Bill Craig has been treed by a moose.

Yet, our knowledge isn't perfectly the same. There is a difference here. Why? Look at the way we react to it. I react to that knowledge by hanging on for dear life in the tree! But you react to that knowledge by running to tell Jan about it. You don't hold on for dear life because you don't believe that you are Bill Craig; you are somebody else. So we have different responses to what we know. That shows that what we know is not exactly the same in both of these cases. We also have a different self-knowledge in addition to the propositional knowledge that we share. We have the same propositional knowledge but our self-knowledge is different.

This self-knowledge is essential to timely action in the world. For example, it is not enough for me to believe the proposition "Bill Craig is hungry" in order to be motivated to get something to eat. For suppose I've been in a car accident and I am lying in a hospital bed with temporary amnesia so that I don't know that I am Bill Craig. If someone were to tell me "Bill Craig is hungry," that wouldn't do anything to motivate me to ask for something to eat. What I need to have is the self-knowledge either that *I* am Bill Craig or that *I* am hungry. Then I will ask for something to eat. This self-knowledge, though it is non-propositional, is vital to getting along in the world and being able to act in a timely way. It is absolutely essential.

If someone or even something, say a supercomputer, had all of the propositional knowledge in the world so that it counted as omniscient because it knew only and all of the truths that there are, it still couldn't decide to take any sort of timely action because it wouldn't have any self-knowledge. So if God is to be a "self" or a "person" he is more than omniscient. In addition to all of the propositional knowledge that he possesses, he also has appropriate self-knowledge. He knows "I am God." That is a perfection. He doesn't know "I am Ronald Reagan" or "I am Napoleon." That would be an imperfection indeed because he is not Ronald Reagan or Napoleon. But it is a perfection for him to have appropriate self-knowledge of who he is – that "I am God." So God's cognitive excellence exceeds even omniscience. He is more than omniscient, as incredible as that sounds, because he not only knows all truth but he also has appropriate self-knowledge as well.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Is it true that we also, through him, have some of that in that we have self-knowledge particularly in light of other animals and so forth that we have I guess, through God's image, can you use that same sort of knowledge base that now human beings have in addition.

Dr. Craig: That is absolutely right. Nobody else in the world has the knowledge "I am Cindy." You are the only person in the world that has that self-knowledge, because you alone are that person. You are right in saying that this differentiates us from animals. As

far as we know, all the evidence indicates that animals are not selves. They do not have this sort of self-knowledge. This has profound implications for the problem of animal pain and suffering. Because even though animals like zebras when they are attacked by a lion suffer pain, they don't have the knowledge "I am in pain." That, I think, has really profound implications for God's permitting animal suffering. They don't suffer in the way that we do because they don't have this self-knowledge that "I am in pain."⁹⁴

Student: It seems to me to be part of the characteristics of the soul.

Dr. Craig: Yes, exactly. I think you are right in saying this is a reflection of the image of God – that we are selves, we are persons, in this special way.

Student: This self concept brings to mind the scripture of "For now we see through a glass darkly but then clearly and we will know ourselves as we are known." We don't really have self-awareness to the degree we are supposed to. The longer we walk with the Lord the more we do.

Dr. Craig: I think that is a little different than what I am talking about here. I would call what you just described self-understanding. That is true. We don't understand ourselves very well. Sometimes we are puzzled why we do the things we do. We don't understand our motivations and our weaknesses and so forth. I would call that self-understanding. But this kind of self-knowledge is something that you have just in virtue of being able to say "I think that . . ." That is unique to each one of you – that you have that kind of first person perspective.

Student: It seems to me like this is more of the case of that first definition being inadequate. If you are going to truly use "omni" for "all" then it is demonstrably inadequate if you base it only on this propositional situation because self-knowledge is not included so that can't be all.

Dr. Craig: Let me respond to that. This is a good point. This would mean that there is knowledge in addition to propositional knowledge. You might say then "omni" ought to include all of that, too. If you say that, though, then I think that omniscience becomes incoherent because then God would have to know and believe that he is Ronald Reagan. Right? Because there is that self-knowledge – Reagan had it. Or the knowledge that he is Napoleon. Napoleon had that knowledge. So I don't think that we want to say that omniscience means that you have to have all knowledge whether propositional or self-knowledge. I think, to be a perfection, it would be to have appropriate self-knowledge, namely, he knows that he himself is God. It would be an imperfection for him to think that he is Napoleon or Ronald Reagan. For that reason I think most theologians would be

reluctant to say that in order to be omniscient you have to have all self-knowledge in addition to all propositional knowledge.

Student: The example you gave of the possible computer that would have all propositional knowledge but lack the knowledge of self – why would it be unable with artificial intelligence for that computer not to be able to be given self as part of its original programming?

Dr. Craig: I am not making a judgment about that. I am just asking you to imagine a device that knew all true propositions but it did not have self-knowledge. I am simply saying that such a thing doesn't have maximum cognitive excellence. Whether or not you could program a robot to have a self-awareness I am not qualified to say. But I am just asking you to think about this illustration to motivate the idea that God's cognitive excellence exceeds even propositional omniscience.

Student: It seems like the middle ground on this is that God knows what it is like to be Ronald Reagan or Napoleon. I am thinking of Dallas Willard's statement, *no physical entity defines its own existence*. So Napoleon or Ronald Reagan couldn't determine in advance that they were going to be who they were rather than a stone or a drop of water or what have you.

Dr. Craig: It is metaphysically impossible, I think, that Ronald Reagan could have been a stone or a drop of water because he is essentially a person. It is possible for him not to exist but I would think that a person's being a person is essential to him. It would be impossible for Reagan to have been a stone.

Student: I agree. But Ronald Reagan couldn't say in advance, *I am going to arrange these molecules to be Ronald Reagan and living*.

Dr. Craig: Right. I want to speak to the more important point that you are making, and that is that God knew what it was like to be Ronald Reagan. I would say that is propositional knowledge.⁹⁵ He knew to be like Ronald Reagan is to be courageous, congenial, outgoing, and optimistic. Right? That is what it is like, partially, to be Ronald Reagan. And that is propositional truth and God knew all of that. But he did not believe that he himself is Ronald Reagan, which is what Reagan believed and knew.

Student: It seems like that part of cognitive excellence that would not be mastered by the computer that knew all propositional truth would be like in your "Bill is treed by a moose" example – the ability to reason. For example, if you said that to me, I would immediately figure out that the most important thing to you is not that Jan knows that you were treed by moose but to solve the problem of being treed by a moose. I'd pull out my rifle, kill the moose, and maybe not even go tell Jan. But I would take care of the

problem. That wouldn't have anything to do with the propositional truth of the statement "I've been treed by a moose." It seems like that is the part of God that . . . they say the reason people do better than computers at playing chess is because we can eliminate the things that are absurd, where the computer has to analyze every possible move. It seems like it is that part of his cognitive excellence would be the ability to reason that he has imparted on us and not to cats or dogs or whatever.

Dr. Craig: All right. I don't want you to be misled by my example into rabbit trails that I didn't mean for us to go down. I think you are quite right. I don't think machines can even add when you think about it. When your little pocket calculator you put $2+3=5$, that machine doesn't know how to add those numbers. It is just a program that exhibits these digital patterns on the screen. I think you are right about that. But that wasn't the point that I am wanting to make here.

END DISCUSSION

Let me go on and say one other thing. Even yet with propositional knowledge and self-knowledge, the excellence of God's knowledge is still not exhausted. What is also important here is the way in which one acquires one's knowledge. Suppose there were two beings and each one had all propositional knowledge and each one had appropriate self-knowledge for himself. But suppose that the second one acquired his knowledge only because the first being told him everything that he knew and the first being just had this knowledge innately. Clearly the second being would not be as intellectually excellent as the first being because he didn't know any of these things innately. He knew them only because the other being told him everything he knew in an innate way. In the same way, as we've seen from Scripture, God doesn't learn anything from anybody. Nobody has instructed the Lord or taught him anything. But I would say that God simply knows all truth innately and therefore is maximally excellent intellectually.

This is, again, just a stunning conclusion. To think God's intellectual excellence outstrips even what it is to be an omniscient being. It does so in that he has this self-knowledge and also in the way that he does not acquire this knowledge from others but simply has it himself. It gives an insight into how great God's intellectual excellence is. I remember when I first realized this in studying the doctrine of omniscience it just floored me, because I never imagined that any person or being could be smarter than omniscient. It seemed to me that omniscient was as high as you can get. Yet, when you think about it, God's cognitive excellence (his greatness) with respect to his intellectual attributes exceeds even omniscience which ought to issue in praise and adoration and wonder of the person God is.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Are you saying that each person's self-knowledge is gained from other people's understanding of him?

Dr. Craig: Are you asking if God's self-knowledge?

Student: No, I am saying that each person's self-knowledge – how do we have our self-knowledge?

Dr. Craig: There, I think that one has self-knowledge simply, as someone earlier said, in virtue of being a person.⁹⁶ A person has a first-person perspective on the things it knows and does and so can say "I think that . . ." It is part of what it means to be a person to have this capacity of self-awareness. So it would be intrinsic to persons.

Student: So if a person, after he is born . . .

Dr. Craig: Right, that is why I said "the capacity." I do think that a developing fetus is a person even though it may not yet have come to self-awareness, but as a person it has this capacity to be self-aware or to have a first person perspective.

Student: So it is possible that this capacity never developed. It is possible that this capacity of self-knowledge could not have been developed completely.

Dr. Craig: Right. Think of a person in a coma who is comatose. That is still a person. You are not at liberty to just kill that individual, even though they are not self-aware at that point. They may not be self-conscious at that point, but as a person they have this intrinsic capacity to be self-aware, to have a first-person perspective on things.

Student: I think God gives each of us self-knowledge through the relationship that we have with him. As David said *I was formed in my mother's womb and it is too wonderful for me to know all these things*. That relationship a lot of times are replaced by idolatry. So the self-knowledge are distorted because we take a person or a statement or something in place of God to form that self-knowledge. I think if our relationship with God is normalized we all have, as the prophets, know what they are to do and what their roles are. All those self-knowledge is given by God. That is why we were chosen and we were predestined.

Dr. Craig: I won't comment on the part about predestination, but I think that the Protestant Reformers agree with the idea that the effect of sin upon us is, as Luther said, we are curved in upon ourselves, and rather than being oriented toward God and seeking his good and his righteousness we seek our own. We are bent in upon our own selves. That is part of the curse and the consequence of sin, it seems to me.

END DISCUSSION

I hope that I've expanded a bit your view of God's cognitive excellence. What we will do next week is look at two problems which arise as a result of God's omniscience. The first will be the relationship between divine foreknowledge and human freedom – how can we be genuinely free to do other than as God infallibly foreknows we will do? Then secondly if we are genuinely free, how can God foreknow that? How can he foreknow what we will do if at the time when it comes we are completely free to do or to not do that action? Those will be two questions we will take up next week.⁹⁷

Lecture 14: Against Fatalism

The study of divine omniscience, as I explained last time, involves two questions – two problems – which are very much discussed and which we want to now address ourselves.

The first of these is the famous question of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. The objection arises here that if God knows in advance everything that happens, every choice that you will ever make, then isn't everything fated to occur? For example, if God knows in advance and predicts that Peter will deny Christ three times then when the time arrives isn't Peter fated to deny Christ three times? Isn't it necessary that Peter deny Christ three times? How could he do anything else since God knows and has predicted that he would do so and God cannot err. It would seem that if Peter could do anything else then God could be mistaken which is impossible. Doesn't it follow from God's complete foreknowledge of the future that fatalism is true? That everything that happens happens necessarily?

Some Christian theologians agree with this. Martin Luther, for example, believed that in virtue of divine foreknowledge of the future there is no human free will – that human freedom is illusory. Others in the Reformed theological tradition have said that God's foreknowledge of the future is based upon his foreordination of everything. Because God foreordains unilaterally everything that will ever happen, then of course by knowing his own will and his omnipotent ability to bring about whatever he ordains, God thereby knows the future. On these views, there really is no human freedom to do otherwise. Everything that happens happens necessarily. Even the fall of man into sin, on this view (since it was foreknown by God) happens necessarily and therefore is part of what God has foreordained to happen.

But this, I think, is a serious theological mistake. If we say that everything that happens happens necessarily in virtue of God's foreordination then that makes God the author of sin. It means that man falls into sin because this is what God ordains to happen unilaterally, and man couldn't possibly have done otherwise. That would make God the author of sin, which would seem to make God himself evil. So this equation between divine foreknowledge of the future and divine foreordination of the future is one, I think, that we ought not to accept.

How then could we defend the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom? I think in the first place we want to break that equation between foreknowing something and foreordaining something. Those are not the same things. God knows in advance all of the choices that people will freely make, but that doesn't mean that he determines those choices. In fact, quite the opposite. If we want to speak of determination, it is the choices that determine what God foreknows, not vice versa. It is

not that because God foreknows you will do something that you do it, it is because you will do it that God foreknows it. If there is any determination going on here it is the event that determines what God foreknows, not that what God foreknows determines the event.

In understanding this, I think it is very helpful to distinguish between two types of priority. *Chronological priority* which would be something being earlier in time. If something is chronologically prior to something else, it is earlier than it in time. *Logical priority* is where something is explanatorily prior to something else. These are not the same thing.⁹⁸ Something can be logically prior to something else without being chronologically prior to it. I think that is exactly what we have in the case of divine foreknowledge and the events foreknown by God. Chronologically God's foreknowledge comes before the event. First God foreknows it, then the event occurs. So the foreknowledge is chronologically prior to the event foreknown. But logically the event is prior to the foreknowledge. God's foreknowledge is what it is because the event is what it is. It is because you will choose pizza for lunch that God foreknows it. It is not that you eat pizza for lunch because God foreknows it. That is to confuse chronological priority with logical priority.

As long as we understand that the object of God's foreknowledge is logically prior to what he foreknows, it doesn't really matter that God's foreknowledge is chronologically prior to the event foreknown. What that means is that if the event were to be different then God's foreknowledge would be different. Those of you who have been with us the last few weeks will recognize there a subjunctive conditional, right? If the event were different then God's foreknowledge would have been different. You will choose pizza for lunch, let's suppose. But you don't have to. You are free to choose something else. If you choose Panda Express instead then God will foreknow that. So if we were to choose Panda Express, God would have foreknown that instead of knowing that you will eat pizza for lunch today. God's foreknowledge tracks your choices like an infallible barometer. The barometer doesn't determine the weather even though chronologically the reading of the barometer may be first. The barometer infallibly tracks what the weather will be in the same way God's foreknowledge infallibly tracks your choices. If your choices were to be different then God's foreknowledge would have been different.

Thus God's foreknowledge doesn't prejudice anything. When the time comes you are completely free to do something other than what you will do. It is just that if you were to do that other thing then God's foreknowledge would have been different instead.

But God's knowledge of the future doesn't fate anything to occur. Let's think about it. Think about some events here on the timeline. Let's imagine a line that is time, and let's imagine here some event E which is foreknown by God. God is in time and he knows in

advance that E will take place. God's knowing that E will take place is not a causal connection between God and E. Merely knowing something about something doesn't cause E to occur. The causes of E will be the prior events in the timeline that bring about E. For all we know E could be a completely contingent event. It might be the decay of a subatomic particle or a free-will decision of a human being, and therefore with respect to the events earlier than E, E may be causally indeterminate. It could happen or it could not happen. How does God merely knowing about the occurrence of a causally indeterminate event make that event fated to occur? How can that event occur necessarily simply in virtue of God's knowing about it? Imagine God didn't know about it. Let's suppose God didn't know E will occur. What has changed with respect to E? Nothing! There is no causal connection between God and E that has now been removed. Everything remains as before. Yet the theological fatalist who thinks foreknowledge implies fatalism would have to say that now E is not fated to occur. Now E doesn't occur necessarily because it is not foreknown by God. But merely adding God's foreknowledge, as I say, doesn't do anything to effect E. So how could E be contingent and free in the one case and yet fated and necessary in the other?⁹⁹

I think fatalism posits a constraint upon human freedom which is simply unintelligible and therefore really makes no sense at all. If an event is not causally determined to occur then that event occurs freely or randomly, and God's merely knowing about it doesn't do anything to make it occur necessarily. Fatalism posits a constraint on human freedom which is simply unintelligible.

So long as our free choices are logically prior to what God foreknows then there is nothing about the chronological priority of divine foreknowledge that prejudices human freedom and implies that everything that happens happens necessarily.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Because there is such a definite correspondence between human behavior and their spiritual alignment so the human behavior happens necessarily according to their spiritual alignment and God knows all about their spiritual alignment and knows the decision that follows and also the behavior will incur what kind of consequence; therefore he reads everything clearly.

Dr. Craig: It sounds to me that you are affirming determinism. You are saying that in virtue of their spiritual character everything you do is determined. I don't think that is true. Even if you think that in virtue of total depravity and our fall into sin, we sin necessarily, still, I think people have the freedom to choose the array of sins that they might commit. So, for example, to take Peter's denial of Jesus. He could have denied him

two times, or maybe he could have denied him four times, or he could have done something different. But for Jesus to be able to predict that Peter would deny Christ three times before the cock crows twice, it just seems to me that cannot be attributed to a person's spiritual disposition such that God was able to infer from his spiritual disposition exactly what would happen. Think about the fall of man into sin. There it seems Adam, not having a sin nature, is free to obey or disobey, and there is nothing about God's foreknowing the fall that would make Adam fall into sin. There was nothing about his spiritual disposition that would make him sin, I think. I want to affirm the view that even though we are fallen and sinful nevertheless there is still genuine human freedom.

Student: This seems to deny the existence of randomness. If I know enough about how something occurs I can postulate it, I can forecast it. I can use the formulas if I had all of the inputs; I could figure out what would happen. But it seems to deny the possibility that there is randomness at that point.

Dr. Craig: I am surprised to hear you say that because I would have thought just the opposite. What I am trying to defend is the view that there can be genuine freedom or randomness in the world.

Student: Then how would it be foreknown?

Dr. Craig: That is a question we haven't addressed. That is the second question. I said there were two questions we want to talk about. The first one is: if God does foreknow your choice or the motion of the subatomic particle, does it happen necessarily? Does God's foreknowledge obliterate randomness and freedom from the universe? What I am saying is "no." This event E (remember E, again, could be random or a free choice theoretically) – whether God knows about it or not doesn't do anything to affect E.

Student: In quantum physics, the old Schroedinger's Cat thing, it seems like observing things cause different things to happen. Could that not be something that is happening here?

Dr. Craig: Ah. OK! All right.¹⁰⁰ That is very interesting because on certain . . . oh boy! You are really opening up a Pandora's Box or a Schroedinger's Box here! On certain interpretations of quantum mechanics the so-called measurement problem arises; namely, the quantum description of the physical system isn't completely determined until it is measured by a classical measuring apparatus which would not have a quantum description. The problem is you could give a quantum description of the classical measuring apparatus, and then that would need then to be measured by a further apparatus. This goes on to infinity. Some have suggested, wait a minute, maybe you can

break the chain – the infinite regress – by saying when a conscious observer sees the result of the measurement then that stops the regress and makes it determinate because you can't give a quantum physical description of a conscious state. That is a non-physical state, right? When a conscious observer looks at the classical measuring apparatus, you can't give a quantum description of the state of consciousness so that breaks the regress and makes reality determinate all the way down.

Student: Does that apply here?

Dr. Craig: That is a very, very interesting question for theism because God is such an observer on a sort of cosmic scale. Maybe he collapses the wave function of the universe so that he is the ultimate observer and makes everything determinate. What I am trying to do, for the sake of argument (I, in fact, don't believe that quantum indeterminacy is ontic or real – I think it is just epistemic; in fact, having God would eliminate indeterminacy), let's assume for the sake of argument that quantum indeterminacy is real. What I am trying to show here is that merely knowing about it doesn't eliminate it. If you don't like the example of E being a quantum indeterminate event then make it a free choice instead. Make it be Peter's denying Christ three times. That will be then unproblematic. You are quite right in raising this interesting question, but I am asking you just for the sake of argument let's not go down that route. Let's assume that these quantum events are random and indeterminate and ask: would merely having knowledge that it would occur mean that it is fated to occur and has to happen? That is an independent question of whether or not in virtue of being observed by an observer the event is now determinate. In fact, even on this version of quantum mechanics, it doesn't mean the event occurs necessarily. It just means it is determinate. It means that there is a time and place specifically at which it occurs. But it doesn't mean that it happens necessarily. So even given that it wouldn't remove the contingency of the event simply by being known about it. It would remove its being indeterminate.

Student: So now I have to have a Newtonian view of God and a quantum view of God!

Dr. Craig: I am trying not to draw those issues in here to keep us, as I say, from opening Pandora's Box.

Student: If our actions are the cause that then is creating the effect of God's foreknowledge . . .

Dr. Craig: Now, wait! I didn't say that. Let's be very careful. Did you hear the question? Do our choices cause God to foreknow what he does? I didn't say that. That would require backward causation.

Student: That's what I was thinking.

Dr. Craig: That you could have an event in the future which would have causal effects in the past. I think that that is a very, very difficult idea. It is problematic. I don't want to say that. That is why I used the word "determined" rather than "caused." I also kind of, even then, waffled on that. I said, "If there is anything here about determining, it would be the event that determines the foreknowledge; not the foreknowledge that determines the event." But I don't think of this as causal priority. We could distinguish another kind of priority here which would be causal priority.¹⁰¹ There I don't want to say that God's knowledge is causally prior to the event or that the event is causally prior to God's foreknowledge. We don't cause knowledge or ideas to pop into God's mind, right? We don't have any kind of causal connection with God to make those things happen. Rather the way it works is like this. We have the ability to choose A or not-A. Whichever we do, the proposition "I will choose A" is true" or the proposition "I will choose not-A" is true." You have the choice to determine which of those propositions is true by making that free choice. God is omniscient and knows only and all true propositions so, in virtue of that proposition being true, that is what God foreknows. But notice neither the relationship between you and a proposition nor the relationship between a proposition and God is a causal relation. This is sort of logical priority or explanatory priority, not causal priority.

Student: Looking at this dilemma on a large scale, when God created the universe he foreknew that man would fall. He had a plan of salvation. In my way of thinking, Christ (being God) took action that then knowing in advance would result in the salvation and a new Jerusalem and new Earth. In that it seems to me prior to the fall of man, prior to creation, there was a simple knowledge of the ultimate realization of a new heaven and a new Earth and a salvation for the human race. We are working that plan out. In my mind, I see that as his salvation of us therefore providing that and knowing that in advance he had to have a plan. He had to have created a plan which, to me, caused the salvation to be possible. In that regard, I am not saying that that action caused us to take certain steps but there seems to be more than just a foreknowledge. There was a plan.

Dr. Craig: Oh, absolutely! I am not here attempting to give an explanation of divine providence. When we get to the subject of doctrine of creation then we will talk about the doctrine of providence and God's sovereignty over the world, directing it, governing it, acting in it to bring about his plan. Don't confuse divine providence with this mere knowledge of what is going to happen in the future. You are quite right. But the Bible does indicate that Christ and his death and the plan of salvation were part of the foreknowledge of God. The Scripture describes Christ as foreknown from before the foundations of the world.¹⁰² So clearly God knew all of this and he worked out a plan in

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102 cf. 1 Peter 1:20

accordance with his perfect knowledge. But we are not talking about those other aspects here. We are just asking this question of what is called theological fatalism. That is: does God's knowing the future imply that everything that happens happens necessarily; there is no free will and no randomness?

Student: Does God's total foreknowledge remove the possibility of God having free will?

Dr. Craig: Good question! If you say that foreknowledge is incompatible with freedom, you not only remove human freedom, you remove divine freedom because God foreknows his own choices and decisions. I don't think we want to say that – that God is determined to do everything he does or that he is fated to do everything he does so that when the time arrives he has no ability to do otherwise. So the theological implications of this go beyond exterminating human freedom. It would eliminate divine freedom as well.

Student: So you could modify your definition of God's foreknowledge to "he has total foreknowledge of all the ramifications for everything he has so far preordained."¹⁰³ He still has the ability to preordain other things or react to free will of man.

Dr. Craig: No. I want to stick to the original definition of omniscience that I gave which was that for any proposition p , if p is true, then God knows that p and he does not believe any false proposition. He has complete knowledge of everything that is going to happen – every future-tensed truth.

Student: What I always get caught up on is if he created you and put you in this specific time and place with these parents and these circumstances, wouldn't he therefore have created me and put me in a place where I would make specific decisions and choices and therefore because he created me and put me here he made me make those decisions.

Dr. Craig: Obviously, there is a kind of soft determinism in virtue of where you are born and of whom you are born. You are not free to suddenly start speaking Vietnamese right now, right? Because you don't have that background. On the other hand, probably Tehwan could start speaking Chinese at the drop of a hat because she has a different background. But that doesn't mean that you are totally determined that you having your hand on your chin is determined causally because of where you were born or by whom. Or the husband that you marry. Certainly our lives are shaped by these things but there is still plenty of room for libertarian free choices within those parameters.

Student: For the sake of completeness, could you say a few words about open theism? I think that is the view that God does not foreknow free choices. That is not a deficiency because it is logically impossible, like he can't make a square circle is not a deficiency. I know a number of people who consider themselves in the camp of orthodox Christianity hold that, including, I think, one of your teachers Clarke Pinnock before he died. One of

the dividends of that would be it would seem to solve at least a large part of the problem of evil. You can't blame God if he didn't know at the creation of the world that Hitler was going to commit the Holocaust.

Dr. Craig: You are right in drawing attention to a significant current within contemporary theology, and evangelical theology frankly. On behalf of those who actually think that foreknowledge implies fatalism, they agree with Luther and certain other thinkers that if God has complete foreknowledge of the future then everything that happens happens necessarily. But unlike Luther and these other theologians, they therefore choose to deny divine foreknowledge rather than freedom. So it is sort of like two ends of the same teeter-totter. Both of these theologians agree that foreknowledge and freedom are incompatible. This leads the Lutheran or Reformed theologian to deny human freedom. It leads the open theist to deny divine foreknowledge. I think, in virtue of the scriptural data that we already reviewed, that open theism is just unbiblical. It isn't even an option for a biblically orthodox Christian. The Scripture not only gives multitudinous examples of God's foreknowledge of the future that couldn't be inferred from present causes like Peter's denying Jesus three times before the cock crows twice. But the Scripture actually says that God has foreknowledge. As I say, it uses words like "foreknowledge" with respect to Christ being foreknown before the foundations of the world and God's entire salvific plan being foreknown. There is a whole family of words in the New Testament that have this prefix "pro" which means "fore" including *prognosis* which is "foreknowledge." It says God has foreknowledge – *prognosis*. But also verbs like *promartureo* ("to bear witness to in advance") and *prokatangelo* ("to tell in advance") and *proginosko* ("to know in advance").¹⁰⁴ It seems to me that it is just biblically unorthodox to deny that God has complete foreknowledge of the future. Therefore, I want to get off the teeter-totter and say that neither of these folks are right – there is no incompatibility between foreknowledge and freedom as long as we keep these crucial distinctions of chronological and logical priority clear in our thinking.

As for the problem of evil, it certainly is true that on open theism since God doesn't know what is going to happen in the future that he didn't know in advance or very far in advance horrible things like the Holocaust and what Hitler would do in World War II. These things catch God off guard, so to speak, on open theism because he is just a sort of super-intelligent but finite counselor who doesn't really know what's going to happen. But I don't think this gets him off the hook for the problem of evil. Once the Holocaust starts to occur, once the Nazis begin to round up the Jews, why doesn't the God of open theism do anything to stop it? You don't need to be a genius to see what is going on in Nazi Germany. Why did he let the bomb plot against Hitler fail by having the bomb be placed behind a heavy table leg? Why didn't he just strike Hitler dead or have the bomb

plot succeed? The fact is that the God of open theism sits idly by twiddling his thumbs while allowing these evils to go on and he doesn't intervene to stop them. At least on the view that we will defend later on when we get to God's sovereignty and full foreknowledge and middle knowledge of everything that will occur, you could say that though God knows about these evils and permits them to occur he never does so without having an overriding justification for doing so. Unlike the God of open theism, he is not caught off guard, he is not surprised. He has morally justifying reasons for allowing the Holocaust to occur. I find that to be a better solution to the problem of evil than to say that God is caught off guard by these things and didn't see them coming and therefore isn't to blame for the evils in the world. But certainly you have pointed out here one of the key issues in the debate over divine foreknowledge and human freedom today, and that would be the problem of evil.

Student: You seem to object to fatalism, and you are using it as a negative, but what then do you do with Ecclesiastes 3:1 where it says, "To everything there is a season, and to everything under the heaven there is a purpose." If God is saying that, or the person who is writing that is saying that on behalf of God, why is fatalism (as it is used negatively) not something where God (as the lady over here said) he has a purpose and a plan and he is working that plan?

Dr. Craig: OK. That would be a good verse to quote against the open theist who says God doesn't have a purpose for allowing everything to occur. They catch him by surprise; he didn't know that was going to happen. On my view, God does have a purpose for everything that happens. With respect to human freedom, he allows you to make choices, but if these are evil choices which he doesn't positively will he permits them to occur because he has overriding reasons for allowing that to happen. Again, this will fit into our discussion of divine providence later on. But don't equate fatalism with God's having providence or sovereignty over the world. Those are two different questions. Fatalism is the view that everything that happens happens necessarily, not that things happen for a purpose. Do you see? It is not that things happen for a purpose, it is that they happen necessarily – there is no freedom, there is no randomness. That is fatalism. I am suggesting that divine foreknowledge doesn't imply that kind of fatalism.

END DISCUSSION¹⁰⁵

Lecture 15: Middle Knowledge

We've been talking about divine omniscience – God's being all-knowing. In the last class we raised a problem that is occasioned by God's knowledge of the future. If God foreknows everything that happens including our choices then are we really free to do otherwise than as God foreknows we shall do? In other words, does God's foreknowledge imply a kind of theological fatalism about the future that everything that happens happens necessarily. I argued that that conclusion does not follow so long as we keep clear the distinction between the chronological priority of God's knowledge to the event foreknown but the logical or explanatory priority of the event foreknown to God's knowledge. God's knowledge does not determine the event. If we use the language of "determine" we would say that the event determines what God foreknows.

So when Judas' betrayal was predicted by Jesus, Judas had the ability not to betray Jesus. He did not have to do it. But if he had chosen not to betray Jesus then God would have foreknown that instead and Jesus would not have predicted it. So we have the ability to do other than as God foreknows that we shall do, but if we were to do other than as he foreknows that we shall do then he would have foreknown something else instead. So long as we keep that distinction between chronological and logical priority clear I think we can see that God's foreknowing the future doesn't in any way threaten human freedom.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Just to clarify, I understand fully what you are saying as far as at each point in time we had the freedom to make decisions of our own free will. When you consider prior to time that God created this world and those that he predetermined or preordained would be his people at the end of time in that sense, we are basically working that out if you will to that conclusion. When you are born and he put you in a certain situation knowing that the situations that he put you in would determine your decisions and therefore at the end it was predetermined you would be saved or not saved. In that sense it seems even before you were born it was working out a play if you will. He knew. I am not suggesting that isn't free will for every point along the way. But his grace and his predetermination, his providence, set the stage for you to make those decisions and come to him. Some would not. I guess that is where people get confused because it seems as if, yes, you have free will along the way but he made you to be one of his and he made this other person not to be one of his and he knew before creation how that would play out. I agree – if we had the total free will in the sense that we determined our destiny, it puts us above God in the sense that we have that full choice. But it is God's grace and God that determines our ultimate destiny.

Dr. Craig: All right. You've said a mouthful! I think what you've done is you've run a number of issues together that need to be teased apart and made clear. We need to make clear distinctions.

First of all, we need to distinguish, I think, between God's foreknowledge of the future (which is the subject of our present discussion) and God's foreordination of the future (predestination is another word for foreordination).¹⁰⁶ The question of divine providence and election and determining your eternal destiny (whether heaven or hell) is a matter of foreordination, not foreknowledge. We'll take up these questions when we get to the doctrine of salvation. We'll discuss the subject of predestination. You'll see there that I consider predestination to be primarily a corporate notion, not an individual notion. That is to say, God predestines a people or selects a people for himself. But then it is up to you by your free choice whether you want to identify with that corporate group and be a member of that elect body. On that basis, foreordination and freedom are entirely compatible. But that needs to be developed, and we will discuss it later.

Right now we just want to talk about foreknowledge. What you said actually forms a nice segue to the next question because what you were asking about was not "does God foreknow what people will do and where they will end up" but you were asking about "does God know what anybody would do if he were to place them in certain circumstances that would determine then how they would choose and where they would wind up." That is not foreknowledge. That is middle knowledge, which is the next subject.

END DISCUSSION

The next subject that we want to broach is the one that was just mentioned, and that is the notion of God's so-called middle knowledge or we could call this hypothetical knowledge. This is God's knowledge of subjunctive conditional statements like "If you had been in Pilate's place, would you have condemned Jesus?" How would you have acted had you been in that situation? That is not foreknowledge because you never are in that situation. What this is called is middle knowledge or knowledge of subjunctive conditionals or hypothetical knowledge.

This kind of knowledge is beautifully illustrated in Charles Dickens' classic story, *A Christmas Carol*. You will remember at the end of that story Scrooge is confronted by the Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come. He is shown horrifying visions of his own death and the death of Tiny Tim and people laughing about Scrooge's death. Horrified by these visions that Scrooge sees, he implores the Spirit, "are these shadows of things that will be or shadows of things that might be only?" The Spirit does not answer Scrooge. Why? Well,

obviously we know from the story's end that the Spirit was not showing Scrooge visions of things that will be. We know Tiny Tim does not die. We know that Scrooge reforms and repents. As a result, the horrible things that the Spirit showed him don't actually happen. So it wasn't foreknowledge. But the Spirit wasn't showing him merely things that might be – mere possibilities. After all, Scrooge might sell his business and become a florist in Covent Garden. That is possible. But why worry about that sort of eventuality? No, what the Spirit was showing Scrooge is what would happen if Scrooge were not to repent. He was imparting to Scrooge knowledge of subjunctive conditionals. Scrooge's question didn't take that into account, so the Spirit does not answer Scrooge.

The question then is: does God have this kind of knowledge? Does he have knowledge of these subjunctive conditionals? In particular, does he have this kind of knowledge prior to his decree to create a world? Does he have hypothetical knowledge logically or explanatorily prior to his decree of a world of what creatures in that world would freely do if they were in various circumstances, or what those same creatures would do if they were in other circumstances, or what would happen in still another possible world in which different creatures were created in different circumstances.¹⁰⁷ Does God have this kind of knowledge logically or explanatorily prior to his decree to create a world?

This is a subject of considerable theological controversy. Proponents of middle knowledge follow the Catholic Counter-Reformer Luis Molina in the late 16th, early 17th century in maintaining that God does have this kind of knowledge. But a good many contemporary theologians would say no – God doesn't have this kind of knowledge. So the previous question couldn't even arise for these theologians because God didn't know what you would do if he were to have you born at this time and place in history. Therefore, he can't be held responsible for your ultimate destiny because he doesn't have middle knowledge. For these theologians, God is in no sense responsible for having created such a messed up world as this one – he didn't see it coming so to speak! Granted, he has simple foreknowledge of the future. He does foreknow whatever will happen, but it is not as though logically prior to that he knew, *If I were to create these people in these circumstances this is the way the world would turn out*. He would just have simple foreknowledge of what will happen, but he didn't have this kind of middle knowledge and therefore can't be held responsible for why the world is so messed up, or why there is so much evil, and so forth.

On the other hand, it seems to me there are powerful theological reasons for affirming that God does have this sort of knowledge. The Bible teaches divine sovereignty and providence over the whole of human history. The Bible says that nothing happens simply by accident outside of the plan and providence of God. Let me get my Bible and read you

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a very interesting passage from the book of Acts. This is from Acts 4. The church in Jerusalem is gathered together in prayer. In Acts 4:27-28, this is how they pray:

for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place.

According to this verse specific persons are named – King Herod, the procurator Pontius Pilate, as well as all the Gentiles that were there, the Jews that were there. This all unfolded according to God’s plan and providence. God is over everything that happens. Everything that happens does so either by God’s direct will or at least his permission in the case of sinful actions.

This kind of providential planning requires middle knowledge. Even the opponents of middle knowledge recognize that you cannot have a robust doctrine of divine providence and sovereignty along with human freedom without middle knowledge. But according to middle knowledge, God knew what every free creature would do under any circumstances in which that creature might be placed. That includes freedom-permitting circumstances. We are not determined by our circumstances to do what we do. In certain circumstances we have a measure of freedom within those same circumstances to act in different ways. By creating certain persons in certain circumstances God can bring it about that his ultimate ends are achieved through the free decisions that people make.¹⁰⁸

When you think of this, you can see this would be unimaginably complex. Only an infinite mind could direct a world of free creatures toward his provisioned ends. Just think, for example, of what it would take to providentially arrange the success of the Allied invasion on D-Day without abusing or abridging the freedom of the people involved. You would need to have a Winston Churchill on the scene. In order for that to happen that means that Lord and Lady Churchill had to have sexual intercourse at just a certain time and place so that that sperm would unite with that egg that would eventually be Winston Churchill. Think of the innumerable contingencies that went into that single event – whether Lady Churchill turned her ankle on a clod in the flower garden that day and so maybe wouldn’t have been in the mood for sex, and whether that clod was there was due to whether the gardener did a faithful job in hoeing and raking the garden that morning, and maybe he didn’t do that because he was feeling depressed and didn’t do his work as energetically. That is just one thing – that’s just Churchill. Think of all of the rest of the people – the free agents – involved, and the multitude of circumstances on both the Allied and Axis sides in order to engineer such an event. Truly only an infinite,

omniscient mind could employ his knowledge of subjunctive conditionals to bring about even a single event in human history.

Middle knowledge, I think, therefore provides the key to the mystery of divine sovereignty and human freedom. By knowing how creatures would freely behave in certain circumstances and putting them in those circumstances, God can ultimately bring about his ends without abridging the freedom of persons but actually allowing them to do as they please knowing that ultimately despite their freedom his ends will be accomplished.

Obviously, creatures (free persons) will make a lot of bad decisions that God doesn't directly will. In any moral situation God always wills that you do the good. He never wills that you should sin. Sin is contrary to the will of God. So God knows that creatures will often not do what he directly wills. Instead they will rebel against him. They will sin. They will choose to act immorally. But given his middle knowledge, even allowing these sins and evils to occur ultimately in this infinitely complex scenario, God's ultimate purposes will be accomplished.

When you look at our messed up world and wonder how could God have created such a messed up world as ours with so much suffering and evil, the proponent of middle knowledge could say God's options may have been limited. It may be that given human freedom and given God's desire that creatures are free, it may be that they would have messed up any world of free creatures that God might have created. Perhaps in any world that was feasible for God to actualize or realize which involves this much good as the actual world, there would have also been this much suffering and this much evil. So God's options may be significantly limited by human freedom to worlds that involve a good deal of suffering and evil. God would, in every circumstance, will that people do the right thing but he will permit them to sin if that is what they will to do.

On the Molinist view, one needs to make a distinction between possible worlds (worlds that are possible for God to actualize) and what we could call feasible or realizable or actualizable worlds. For example, a world of free creatures involving this much good in which everybody always does the right thing (no one ever sins) is a possible world. That wouldn't be a robot world. This would be a world in which everybody has freedom, but they all always do the right thing. They always freely do the moral thing.¹⁰⁹ So there would be no sin in that world. But given human freedom, it may be the case that such a world isn't feasible for God because if God were to create those creatures in those circumstances, even though it is possible for them to do the right thing, they wouldn't. They would go wrong, and they would mess up the world. So God's options of feasible

worlds may be limited in the suffering and the evil that must be permitted in order to accomplish his will.

Nevertheless, as a good God in his providence he has selected a world which on balance has more good than evil. Ultimately his will will be accomplished. It will win out. His purpose will be achieved. There will be a multitude of persons in heaven from every tribe and tongue and people and nation who have come to know God and his salvation and have freely come into a relationship with him.

We can be confident that God's choice of a world is the best. Despite the evil and the suffering in the world, we can have trust and confidence in God that he has chosen a world which was a wise choice and a good choice. The onus for messing up the world is on us. It is not on God. It is we who, through our free choices, turned the world into such a decadent and evil place. God allows that, but only with the view toward accomplishing his ultimately good purpose.

That would be a defense of the doctrine of middle knowledge. I think it is the only way to give a reconciliation of divine sovereignty and human freedom which affirms libertarian freedom but also God's providence over everything that happens in the world. That gives powerful theological motivation, I think, for adopting a doctrine of middle knowledge.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Under this view, is this the greatest feasible world?

Dr. Craig: Very good question. The question is – granted, this isn't the best possible world because we can imagine worlds that are better than this. Worlds without sin, for example, might be better. This isn't the best possible world. But is this the best feasible world? I think that is an open question. It may be that even with respect to feasible worlds there isn't any maximum. They just get better and better and better. God could always have created more people, brought more folks into the Kingdom. Perhaps worlds don't have an intrinsic maximal value. Therefore what God has to do is not choose the best feasible world but just a good feasible world. For any world that he picks there could always be one better, but so long as he picks a good world he does nothing wrong. I think probably most Christian philosophers today would be inclined to say there isn't any ceiling to the goodness of worlds. It could just go on and on. But if you do think there is a sort of ceiling then I think what you could say is there is a range of feasible worlds which are all in the top rung – they are all at the ceiling so to speak – and this world is one of those and God has picked one feasible world out of the best that could be made. I don't see any problem with that. Given human freedom, it may be that any world feasible for God involving this much good would involve a lot of evil and suffering. So this may be the best God could get.

Student: It appears in the Bible that there are other worlds envisioned, like the eternal state, and if you believe in it the millennium, et. al. Does that imply if a world without sin and all we're all robots in the eternal state where we don't sin – is that a robot world?

Dr. Craig: This is a good question. I think that the question fails to appreciate that when we are talking about worlds, we mean a maximal state of affairs.¹¹⁰ The afterlife – heaven, hell, the millennium – are not possible worlds. They are the final stage of a possible world. But they have a prehistory that leads up to them. In heaven one receives one's reward or recompense for what one did during human history prior to that. These are the final stages of a possible world. They are not possible worlds in and of themselves. You might say, but why not just create heaven by itself. Just lop off the part before death and just start with heaven. The problem there is then you would have a new possible world and it might be that if God were to try to do that then the creatures there would go wrong and would mess it up. You can't just sort of extract the bad parts and think that the situation is unaffected. Once you do that you got a whole new situation and the game needs to be then replayed.

My inclination (and this is just my opinion) is that in heaven I think it is very plausible that the freedom to sin will be removed. I think that in this life God has created us at a sort of arm's distance that allows us freedom to rebel against him and do evil and resist him. But in heaven the redeemed in Christ will have such a knowledge of God and of closeness to Christ that he will be irresistible in his beauty, magnificence, and love, and the freedom to sin will be effectively removed. Sin is possible only during this veil of decision making at which we see through a glass darkly, so to speak. Here we determine our eternal destiny. But then once we see face-to-face that vision will be so lovely and so irresistible that sin will be impossible in heaven.

Student: Will we be able to see the middle knowledge as God dealing with human inclination in terms of the law of inertia? If you are uncertain, you set your course on a certain way unless there is an external force it will just continue that way. In the beginning when Adam and Eve set their inclination into leaning on their own understanding and defining good and evil according to their own understanding, God can project the result of this momentum to the ultimate destruction. So he intervenes. So Jesus says *My Father is always at work; and I am working, too.* That work is just to counter this kind of human momentum. Saying that God has perfect middle knowledge, he can project exactly a little inclination will eventually come through.

Dr. Craig: That isn't the way in which someone like Molina would explain middle knowledge. He would simply say that God sees into each individual creature's essence so deeply that he knows what that creature would do freely in any set of circumstances

¹¹⁰ 25:02

including an initial set of circumstances before any character was laid down that might influence subsequent decisions. But as a sociological fact, what you are saying is obviously true, isn't it? People do develop characters and habit patterns and inclinations that will influence them on into the future, both for good and for ill. You can also develop a good character that will help you to resist temptation or do the right thing. I don't think that is incompatible with human freedom because even the person who is morally corrupt can still choose, say, which kinds of drugs he wants to do or whom to beat up and rob. One can choose a variety of sins but certainly you are right that given corrupted fallen human nature there is that kind of inertia to sin that exists within fallen humanity.¹¹¹ But I resist those analogies a little bit because I don't want to, in any way, suggest these decisions are not free and that we are not morally responsible for them. We are not like ball bearings rolling down a chute that have no freedom and no will and hence no responsible for what they hit and run into.

Student: As far as creature groups maintaining their perfection, we are 0-and-2. You've got angels and you've got humans. I'm inclined to believe that any creature with an absolute free will given an infinite amount of time will have to go up against God's will, have to break God's will at some point, and therefore fall. In my mind, it is hard for me to imagine any creature with a total free will remaining totally within the will of God.

Dr. Craig: That is a really, really interesting question. I don't want to say myself that sin is inevitable. That the creatures couldn't avoid it because they do have freedom. But I think what you could say is given enough time every creature eventually will sin. He won't go on forever freely always choosing the right thing. That is not to say it is inevitable, but just that it will eventually happen. He will eventually sin. That seems not implausible at all to me and would be compatible with human freedom. That is one reason, I think, that in heaven it is very plausible that when we see God in all of his beauty and righteousness that our freedom to sin will be effectively removed. It is not as though in heaven we will go on infinitely always choosing the good. It is our ability to choose against God is just removed in the same way iron filings attracted to a giant electromagnet just stick to the magnet because it is so attractive. They couldn't resist it. I am sure that God, once we see him face-to-face and not through a glass darkly, will be so attractive that the freedom to rebel against him and turn against him will be removed.

END DISCUSSION

Next time we will look at some application of the doctrine of divine omniscience to our lives practically. But I will be happy to take any further discussion at that time as well.¹¹²

¹¹¹ 30:07

¹¹² Total Running Time: 33:17 (Copyright © 2015 William Lane Craig)

Lecture 16: Practical Application of God's Omniscience / God's Omnipotence

In our last time together we looked at God's knowledge of so-called subjunctive conditionals or counterfactuals which is known as middle knowledge. I argued that although this is a controversial subject that not all Christians agree on, nevertheless there are considerable theological reasons for believing that God does have middle knowledge, namely, it is the only way to provide a robust doctrine of divine providence and sovereignty that is compatible with human libertarian freedom. For that reason I think that this is an aspect of divine omniscience that is important and well worth affirming.

Let's go to the application section of the lesson. I want to draw three practical applications of this attribute of divine omniscience to our lives today.

First of all, God's omniscience serves as a basis for total trust in God's guidance in your life. Because God is omniscient, he never makes a mistake. He never changes his mind due to a lack of foresight. He never overlooks anything; nothing ever catches him by surprise. Therefore we can confidently trust him as he guides us through life. This is especially true if we affirm the doctrine of middle knowledge because then it means that everything that happens in your life happens either by God's direct will or at least his permission with respect to greater goods that might be achieved. No matter what you go through, no matter how difficult the suffering or the trial, no matter how far away God may seem and you feel abandoned by God, nevertheless, on the basis of God's omniscience, we can know that God is guiding you and leading you as you trust in him.

Proverbs 3:5-6 give us this advice: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." That is such good advice in view of God's omniscience and middle knowledge. The complexity of the planning of a world of free creatures is such that we could never trust our own insight to discern the right way, but we can trust in the Lord who is omniscient as he guides us through life.

That means that God's will for your life, whatever it might be, is perfect. It is exactly what God wants for you. In Romans 12:1-2, Paul makes the following appeal:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, [why?] that you may prove what is the will of God, [and what characterizes the will of God?] what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Notice that Paul here calls for a total surrender to God of body and of soul, confident in the fact that you will be able to prove or discern what God's will is for you. God's will for your life, Paul says, is good and acceptable (not only to God but if you could understand it it would be acceptable to you) and it is perfect, which means there is nothing that you could do to improve upon it. What a call, what a reason, to trust in God as he leads you even through the dark valleys and the difficult seasons of life. We can trust him for a marriage partner in life. We can trust him for our career path. We can trust him during times of illness and disappointment and suffering, even as we go into death we can trust in him because of his omniscience and guidance.¹¹³

Secondly, God's omniscience is a source of comfort in God's knowledge of your heart. In many circumstances, others may misunderstand us and our motivations. They may malign us and impute to us false motivations that aren't at all what we intended. In these kinds of situations it is comforting to know that God knows our hearts. He knows where your heart really lies and what your motivations really are. 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "For the LORD does not look on things as a man looks on them; man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

God knows our heart; he discerns our true motivations. He understands us even when we fail and do not live up to the standard that we should. Psalms 103:13-14 says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust." Here God is described as a compassionate God who understands us and our frailty and fallibility and has compassion on us as a father has compassion on his children.

Even at times when our devotion seems low and we are not in fellowship with the Lord as we ought to be, God knows the truth. He knows the truth about your heart and that you do love him and that you want to follow him. In John 21:17, John describes the scene where Jesus meets with Peter during the miraculous catch of fish on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus asks Peter three times, "Peter, do you love me?" John records that Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him for the third time, "Do you love me," (doubtless this reflects Peter's denying Christ three times and Jesus brings this painful memory back to Peter by asking him three times, "Do you love me?") and Peter said, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." Peter finds comfort in Jesus knowing his heart and knowing all things. He knows that he loves him even though he has failed him in the past. So there is a comfort, I think, in the awareness that God has a knowledge of our hearts and understands and has compassion on us.

Finally, God's omniscience is a source of security in God's love. There is no new information that God might acquire about you that would affect his love for you. There

are no skeletons in your closet that he is not already aware of. There is no future fall that he isn't aware of that could affect his love for you. He knows us entirely and thoroughly – through and through. And yet, in spite of all that, he loves us unfailingly.

1 John 3:19-20 says, “By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.” Even when we are fallen and we sin and disappoint ourselves and God and let God down, God knows our hearts. He still loves us and we can reassure our hearts before him, as John says, by having the knowledge of this unfailing love.

So there isn't any need to hide from God. There is no need to try to conceal from him our sin, our struggles, our doubts, our failures. We can be honest with God and bring these before him because he knows us thoroughly. In fact, although we very often as Christians talk about the importance of our knowing God, in one sense what is really important is that God knows us, that he is related to us regardless of the awareness we might have of that relationship.¹¹⁴ That relationship is one of God's knowing us, not just our knowing God.

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, in the second half of that verse, Paul says, “Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.” Paul says, *Right now my knowledge is incomplete, it is partial, but someday I will fully understand. But I am already fully understood by God.* Our knowledge is partial, but God has complete and full understanding and knowledge of us. So in Galatians 4:9 Paul says, “You have come to know God, or rather, to be known by God.” There is that reverse. It is not just that you've come to know God, rather (Paul says) you have come to be known by him. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 8:3, Paul says, “If one loves God, then one is known by him.”

So this relationship to God is not simply one of our knowing him, but even more fundamentally it is his knowing us – something that I think we sometimes overlook and fail to appreciate. As Christians, we are now known by God and loved by him. So we can be totally honest and open before him.

In Psalms 32:3-7, the psalmist says,

When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Therefore let every one who is godly offer prayer to thee; at a time of distress, in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

Thou art a hiding place for me, thou preservest me from trouble; thou dost encompass me with deliverance.

Here the psalmist contrasts what it was like hiding his sin from God, trying to cover it up, and the misery that he experienced. But then the freedom that comes with acknowledging and confessing his sin and then experiencing God's forgiveness.

So God's omniscience, I think, is a source of encouragement for us to be honest and open with God and to keep short accounts with God and to confess as soon as we are aware of a sin in our life and to keep those channels open to God because we know that we are secure in his love and do not need to hide anything from him.

Those are some thoughts about the application of this attribute.

START DISCUSSION

Student: It seems to me that when Paul speaks in Athens in Acts 17, I think you went there and quoted his speech a few years ago. He says a couple of things that are implications of not just the omniscience but also the omnipresence and omnipotence of God. We don't sometimes think about these – that God does not need anything from us. We see around us the world seems to be spinning out of control, but he does not need our help. Second, he says God is not far from us. He is talking to people who are pagans, who are unbelievers. Those are two implications it seems to me that flow from what you are saying.

Dr. Craig: These attributes of God coalesce don't they? They come together. Some of the things that I've said you could make a practical application of God's love rather than omniscience. But they all, I think, go together to make up the character of God that has these wonderful practical implications for our lives. Omnipotence and omnipresence would go right in with that of course.

Student: You may have already talked about this in an earlier class. I don't want to make you go over old ground.¹¹⁵ But I am wondering how does this issue of middle knowledge and the fact that God knows what we will do in the future tie into free will since our future acts are already known? As a critic would say, how are we really free then?

Dr. Craig: We did talk about that! I said there were two problems that arise from God's knowledge of the future, you may remember. The first was the problem of theological fatalism. If God knows what you will do then when the time arrives do you really have the ability to do something different? Or are you fated to do what you do? The second question was the question of God's knowledge of these subjunctive conditionals. With respect to the first, you will remember I said we need to differentiate between

chronological priority and logical priority. Even though God's foreknowledge is chronologically prior to your choice, your choice is logically prior to God's foreknowledge. You have the ability to choose either way, and which ever way you choose will determine then what God foreknows. So when the time comes you have the ability to act in a way that if you were to act in that way God would have foreknown something different than what he, in fact, does foreknow.

END DISCUSSION

We've been talking about God's intellectual attributes as a personal being. Now we want to turn to God's volitional attributes. As a personal being, God has volition – he has will. His volitional attributes are expressed in the attribute of omnipotence or being all-powerful. Let's look at some of the scriptural data that is pertinent to the doctrine of God's omnipotence or his being all-powerful.

First, the Bible indicates that God is almighty. Genesis 17:1 – this is the appearance of God to Abram – “When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless’.” The word there in the Hebrew translated as “God Almighty” is the familiar expression “El Shaddai.” God reveals himself to Abram as El Shaddai – God Almighty.

This same name for God carries through the Bible right to the last book of the New Testament, Revelation 19:6, when we see the marriage supper of the Lamb: “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.’” God is called “Almighty” in Scripture.

The almighty power of God in Scripture is most manifested in the act of creation. God creates the world out of nothing. He doesn't need any material substratum (any matter or energy) out of which to create the world. He creates the matter and energy as well as the things that are constituted by matter and energy. The doctrine of creation out of nothing is the most powerful or visual display of God's omnipotence in the Scriptures.

Genesis 1:1 begins with the words, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” In the beginning God created the universe. Psalm 33:9 is a psalm that extols God's power in creation. It says, “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.” The creation simply comes into being at the verbal command of the Lord. His almighty word brings the universe into existence.¹¹⁶

In Romans 4:17, Paul uses a striking phrase to characterize this creation out of nothing. In the latter part of that verse he speaks of Abraham's being in the presence of God in whom he believed and then this phrase: “who gives life to the dead and calls into

existence the things that do not exist.” Here the two mighty acts of God – creation and the resurrection – are mentioned as manifestations of his power. God is the one who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. I love that phrase. He calls these things into being even though they don’t exist. This is truly creation from nothing. He constitutes these things in being.

That is the first scriptural point. God is called “God Almighty.”

Secondly, the Scriptures indicate that God can do all things – or God can do anything. There are a number of scriptural passages that state this explicitly. Genesis 18:14 to begin with. This is the promise to Abraham and Sarah that they will have a child in their old age which provokes laughter on Sarah’s part. But in verse 14 of Genesis 18, the Lord says, “Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you in the spring and Sarah shall have a son.” Notice the question there - “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” This question is purely a rhetorical question. The answer is clearly no, nothing is too hard for the Lord.

In Jeremiah 32:17 we have a similar question and answer. The question actually appears in verses 26 and 27 of Jeremiah 32: “The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: ‘Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?’” Unless you have any doubt about the answer to that question, look at verse 17: “Ah Lord GOD! It is thou who hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thy outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for thee.” The Scriptures say that God can do anything. There is nothing that is too hard for God to do.

Job 42:1-2 is the final scene in the book of Job where Job realizes God’s incomprehensible greatness and his inability to fathom the power of God. In verse 1 of chapter 42, “Then Job answered the LORD: ‘I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted.’” Here Job confesses that God can do all things.

This is not a doctrine confined to the Old Testament. It is repeated in the New Testament by Jesus himself. In Matthew 19:26, Jesus is speaking to his disciples. “Jesus looked to them and said to them, ‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”

Also in Mark 14:36 we find Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.” So Jesus also affirms that God can do all things.¹¹⁷

So we have the testimony of Scripture that God is almighty and can do all things, which is pretty powerful scriptural warrant for saying that God is omnipotent.

Let's talk about the attribute of omnipotence, which means being all-powerful. We are immediately confronted with the paradoxes of omnipotence because although the Scriptures say that God can do all things it seems intuitively obvious that there are certain things that God cannot do. For example, can God act contrary to his own nature? If God has certain essential properties then how could God possibly act in a way that would be contrary to his own essence or nature? For example, could God create another god and then worship it? That seems absolutely inconceivable. God cannot be created so God couldn't create another God. It would be idolatrous and blasphemous for him to worship some other god. Or, could God commit adultery? Again this seems absurd to think that God could act in such a way that would be contrary to his moral character. Christian theologians typically do not say that God can act contrary to his own nature. God always acts in a way that is consistent with his own nature. He cannot act contrary to his nature.

Secondly, what about logical impossibilities? Can God do something that is logically impossible? For example, could God have made it true that Jesus both came and died on the cross and that he did not come and die on the cross? These are logical contradictions. Could he make a logical contradiction come true? Could God make a round square, for example? Again, Christian theologians almost universally would say that God's being all-powerful doesn't mean that he can do things that are logically impossible. Though there have been exceptions – for example, the great philosopher Rene Descartes (who was a committed Christian philosopher) believed that God could do logical impossibilities and that the laws of logical and mathematics depend upon God's will. God has willed the law of contradiction to be true, and he has willed certain other logically necessary truths. So ultimately these sorts of logical necessities are not rooted in God's nature for Descartes but in his will. But Descartes stands here as a real outlier, a real maverick. By far and away it is virtually universal among Christian thinkers that to say God is omnipotent doesn't mean that he can do logical impossibilities. These are not things at all. They are just contradictory combinations of words. There is no such "thing" as a round square that God is incapable of making. These are just logical contradictions verbally and therefore are not things that God's power needs to encompass.

Thirdly, what about things that are logically possible but they are unactualizable? Are there things that are logically possible in themselves but they are incapable of being realized in reality? Incapable of being actualized – I call these unactualizable. For example, it seems logically possible that people could always choose to do the right things – that they would never sin. That would mean that there is a logically possible world which includes God in which people never sin but always freely do the right thing. This would not be a robot world. It is not a marionette world where God is pulling the

puppet strings and making these people always choose the right thing.¹¹⁸ It is just that in any moral situation in which you find yourself you have the ability to choose to do good or not to do good. You have the ability to choose evil or good, and you are not logically forced to do the wrong thing. It is logically possible for you to do the right thing. What if everybody always did the right thing? What if everybody always simply freely chose to obey God? Then you would have a world in which there would be no sin even though there is human freedom. So there must be a logically possible world like that. But does that mean that therefore God is capable of creating such a world? That doesn't follow because it may be that given human freedom if God were to try to actualize such a world the people would go wrong and would sin and therefore this world would not result. You can think of it in this way. It is not simply up to God which world becomes actual. If people have freedom then they co-actualize the world along with God. If God gives them freedom then he doesn't determine what they choose. He stands back so to speak and lets them make their choices in those moral situations in which they find themselves. What that means is that there are logically possible worlds that are perfectly consistent in and of themselves but which God is incapable of creating. He is incapable of actualizing them. Why? The reason would be because the wrong subjunctive conditionals are true. It is logically possible that if Peter were in these certain circumstances he would not deny Christ. He would faithfully confess Christ. That is possible. But nevertheless it may be the case that if Peter were in these circumstances he would freely deny Christ three times. So that logically possible world isn't available to God to actualize. It is infeasible for him to actualize even though it is logically possible. I think you can already see this is very intimately related to the question of middle knowledge. On middle knowledge there is a very significant distinction between worlds which are possible and worlds which are feasible for God to actualize. It may be that there is a whole range of worlds that are logically possible – like a sinless world – but which God is incapable of creating because the creatures would in fact go wrong. Therefore, God (even though he is omnipotent) isn't necessarily capable of actualizing just any logically possible state of affairs.

So it seems that there are these paradoxes of omnipotence that seem to impose limits upon God's power. How then should we understand God's omnipotence? I think that we should say, as I've already indicated, that these things aren't really "things" at all that God is incapable of doing. These represent purely logical limits on God's power. Even his inability to actualize a logically possible world is a logical limit because it is logically impossible to make creatures freely do something. The source of the limitation is purely logic, and logic, I think, is based in the nature of God himself. It is a reflection of his own essence and nature that God acts in logically consistent ways.

Here is a possible definition of omnipotence that I think is usable. I have to say this can get very complicated when you read philosophical literature on this. But here is a simple way of putting it.

God can bring about any state of affairs which is logically possible for anyone to bring about in that situation.

If anyone in that situation would be capable of bringing about that state of affairs then God must be capable of bringing about that state of affairs.¹¹⁹

How would that apply to some of these exceptions that we talked about? No one could bring about the state of affairs of God's acting contrary to his own nature. That is simply logically impossible. So no one has that power. Similarly, nobody would have the power to bring it about that a square circle exists or that a married bachelor exists. No one could bring about a state of affairs in which there is a stone too heavy for God to lift, for example. This is simply a logically incoherent state of affairs. Nobody could bring that about. Or no one in God's situation could bring about these worlds that are logically possible in themselves but which are infeasible because of the subjunctive conditionals that happen to be true. Anybody in that situation will be confronted with the same limitations – the same counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

So I think this gives a kind of rough and ready idea of divine omnipotence. God is able to bring about any state of affairs which is logically possible for anyone to bring about who is in that situation.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Back to creating the possible worlds – how would you answer the person (I'm sure you've heard it many times; I have), "If God knew who would fall away, who would not believe, and God could do all things, then why did he not just create a world that only had the people in it that would not choose wrong and fall away?"

Dr. Craig: What this question falls to understand is that you can't pluck people out of a world and then assemble a new world with just those people. Say all the people who are elect in this world. You just kind of pluck them out and then put them in a world by themselves. Because what happens then is that's a new world, and they may not act the same way in that world that they do in the actual world. It may well be the case that if you collected all of those people that in the actual world are Christians and put them in a world just by themselves and let them be free, a whole lot of them would not be Christians, would not be believers, and would be damned. The person fails to understand that when you take these individuals and put them together you've got a whole new

world now to deal with and you need to ask what subjunctive conditionals are true in that world.

END DISCUSSION

Next time I will continue the discussion of omnipotence and we'll look at an application of this to our practical lives.¹²⁰

Lecture 17: Practical Applications of God's Omnipotence

We've been talking about God's attribute of divine omnipotence. I suggested that the doctrine that God is omnipotent doesn't mean that you can say God can do "blank" and just combine that with any sort of words like "make a round square" or "sin" or "act contrary to his nature." I suggested that a rough-and-ready definition of "omnipotence" would be that God can bring about any state of affairs which is logically possible for someone in that situation to bring about. That would mean that the limits to God's power are simply those of logic. When people talk about logical impossibilities they are not really talking about things that God cannot do because those are not things at all. They are just contradictory combinations of words.

So when the Scripture says that God can do all things, I think that what it means is what this definition implies – he can bring about any state of affairs which is logically possible to bring about for someone in such a situation. *[Dr. Craig then repeats the definition for someone in the class.]* No one could bring about the state of affairs, for example, of God making a rock heavier than he can lift. Nobody can bring about the state of affairs of God's sinning, of a morally perfect being committing a sin. Nobody could bring it about the different counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true than the ones that are true – that correspond to persons other than the agent. In every case it is simply a matter of logic that circumscribe the limits of God's power. And that makes him omnipotent.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I know you said it was a minority position, but do you know of any philosophers or theologians that disagree with that definition?

Dr. Craig: Yes. We mentioned Rene Descartes. He historically thought that God could bring it about that $2+2=5$, that logical and mathematical truths depend not upon God's nature but upon his will and that he could have willed otherwise. The Oxford Christian philosopher Brian Leftow has recently published a book called *God and Necessity* where he tries to ground logically necessary truths in God. He will ground the truths of logic and mathematics in God's nature. That is the mainstream Christian position, not Descartes' position. Leftow is not a voluntarist about the truths of logic and mathematics. Those are grounded in God's nature. But he does defend the very radical view that other sorts of necessary truths are grounded in God's will. He thinks that it was in God . . . This is the locution he uses – you can't say it was possible for God to do these things because what is possible and necessary has now been determined by God so it would be impossible. It lay within God to have made cats be reptiles, or to have lizards be mammals. That is logically impossible for a cat to be a reptile. And Leftow would agree. Yes, now that God has made his decree it is logically impossible but it was within God to

have decreed otherwise. There are examples of voluntarism with respect to certain kinds of necessary truths on the scene today. This is a brand new book so I don't know if Leftow will generate any following in this regard. He admits that the mainstream Christian position on these issues is that modality or whether truth is necessary or possible is grounded in God's nature and not in his will.¹²¹ It is not as though God could have made it up that cats be reptiles on the mainstream position. But the question is a good one, and there are minority representatives of this view. Leftow has a different definition of omnipotence because he doesn't want to say that God's power is circumscribed by logic. Certain logically necessary truths depend upon God's will and had been freely decreed by God. So he has a different definition of omnipotence that is very convoluted and very philosophically dense that I am not going to try to unpack in this class.

Student: When I heard the definition last week, I mentioned to my son that to me it sounded limiting, (he corrected me), in the sense that to me it doesn't lend to the fact that God can do things that no one else could do, i.e. create something out of nothing, raise the dead. I just wanted to hear your answer to that.

Dr. Craig: I am not suggesting that God's power is limited to what any other persons (creatures) could do. The point there that one was trying to get at is that God finds himself confronted with these true subjunctive conditionals like "If Peter were in C he would freely deny Christ three times" or "If Pontius Pilate were in circumstances C he would sentence Christ to the cross." The truths of these counterfactuals, though contingent (they are not logically necessary, right?), are not within God's power because they depend upon the free decisions of creatures. The point of the definition was that omnipotence shouldn't require someone to have power over these counterfactuals about what other people would do. Anybody who was in this situation of being confronted with these counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (what other people would freely do) shouldn't have to have power over them in order to qualify as omnipotence. That was the reason for the clause. But when we say "anyone" that would include God as well because he is someone who is in that situation. That was the point of universalizing it to any agent. I certainly didn't mean to restrict God's power to what actual agents can and cannot do. You can see that this can get very complicated the minute you scratch beneath the surface, but I think it gives us, as I say, a kind of rough-and-ready idea of what omnipotence is. The only "limits" on God's power are purely logical, which is to say they are not really limits at all.

END DISCUSSION

Let me say something now about what practical application the attribute of divine omnipotence has to our lives. I have three that I wanted to mention.

1. The first application of our serving an omnipotent God is that *you are a walking stick of dynamite* because the same power that brought the universe into being out of nothing and that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you to do God's will. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:6-10 for Paul's affirmation of this truth. Paul says,

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," [the God who spoke the universe into being in Genesis 1] who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels [our frail, weak, mortal bodies], to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Our bodies are frail, mortal, and wasting away.¹²² Yet, while death is at work in these mortal bodies there is the powerful transcendent life of God that is resonant there and is working through us. It gives us strength to endure every affliction and trial such as Paul describes.

If you look at Paul's letter to the Ephesian church, Ephesians 1:19-21, you'll see there that Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians that they might know

what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

Just as in 2 Corinthians, Paul says it is the God who spoke the world into being whose transcendent power is in work in us. Here in Ephesians Paul says it is the immeasurable greatness of the power of him who raised Jesus from the dead that is now at work in us.

Flipping over to Ephesians 3:20-21, Paul gives this wonderful doxology:

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

I firmly believe that we limit God through our reduced vision of what he can do in our lives. Paul says the power of God at work within us is able to do far more abundantly

¹²²

10:19

than all that we ask or think. We need to ask and think for greater things from God – for him to do great works through us and not to limit him because of our limited vision of what he can do through his power within us. Even though we ourselves may be weak and impotent, Christ living in us gives us tremendous power.

Look at the interesting contrast between John 15:5 and Philippians 4:13. John 15:5 is Jesus' word or parable about the vine and the branches. In John 15:5 Jesus says, "He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." That shows how much power we have. Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing" of any spiritual significance. Yet, turning over to Philippians 4:13, Paul affirms this: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!" What a wonderful paradox that is. Apart from Christ you can do nothing, but I can do all things through him who strengthens me. So it is through that abiding power of Christ within us that we can accomplish God's will for our lives.

The remarkable thing about this is that God's power works through our weakness, not just simply in spite of it. Paul, as you may know, suffered from some sort of debilitating chronic disease or disability that hindered him in his travels and ministries. He speaks about this in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10,

Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me [he wanted to be healed of this physical condition¹²³]; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Isn't that a remarkable affirmation on Paul's part? He rejoices in his weakness because in his weakness the power of God is made all the more manifest.

I imagine you have seen, as we have, Christians in whom this is exemplified. I think, for example, of our friends, Fred and Elaine. Fred was a vibrant Christian man, active in his church and in his apartment community that he helped to manage. Then he suffered a massive stroke that left him half-paralyzed, seriously debilitated. He had to go into a nursing home and then into an assisted living facility where he still lives today. He cannot be at home. He cannot care for himself. When you see how Fred's life has been utterly transformed (and Elaine's as well) I think to myself it would be so easy to lapse into deep depression, if not even despair, over having one's life ruined in this way. Yet, in the midst of this assisted living care facility, Fred and Elaine have begun to minister to other people in that facility. Today they have a Bible study going where they are leading other

people in the home through Bible study and prayer and being a bright light for Christ in the midst of that condition. I look at Fred and I think, goodness sake, there is a man in whom the power of God is so evident because I know in my strength I couldn't do such a thing if such an accident befell me. Yet the power of God in Fred and Elaine shines through all the more brightly because of the terrible weakness that he now suffers.

I have to say even this morning, sitting in the balcony during the morning worship service, as I was waiting for the service to begin, my eye was caught by a man pushing a woman in a wheelchair down the front aisle of the sanctuary and back to the pew where they would sit. As I watched them I noticed that this elderly woman was crumpled over in the wheelchair. Her head was hanging over her chest. She was slumped down. He finally got her to the pew. She was able to stand and shift herself into the pew. Then he took the chair away. Then she sort of crumpled again into the pew as she sat in the service. As I watched her, I noticed her gray hair was beautifully quaffed. She had on her finest Sunday clothes, beautifully dressed. She had a Bible on her lap that the man picked up off of her lap and then handed back to her as she sat in the morning service. I thought to myself, think of the effort that this woman has to exert in order to come to church this morning compared to me. It would be so much easier just to stay home and watch the service on live stream. But she makes the effort to get dressed up and to come with her Bible. She wants to be in the pew in the service live. I thought it is the power of God that is manifest in this woman that I was looking at. It was really, again, just convicting to me about the way in which the Lord's strength and power can be so manifested through human weakness.

That is the first point that I wanted to share. The power of God is at work within us, and we must not underestimate that. When we are weak, when we go through afflictions and hard times, those are the times when that power can be most manifest in our lives.¹²⁴

2. The second practical application is that *nothing can defeat God's purposes*. In Ephesians 1:11 Paul says this: "In him [Christ], according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will," and the sentence then continues. That phrase "him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will" – all the will of God – will be done. It will be accomplished, and nothing is going to be able to defeat God's purposes. If God wants something for you, you will get it. If he wants you to accomplish something then as you trust in him and rely upon his power you will accomplish it.

You can see this, for example, in the life of a biblical character like Joseph. God had a plan for Joseph, didn't he? That he would save his family from famine by rising to be the right-hand man of Pharaoh when the famine hit Palestine. Even beyond that, God's plan

to have Israel be in Egypt for those four hundred years until the land of Canaan was ripe for judgment and it was time for God to bring Israel out of Egypt into Canaan. God's purpose would be accomplished. But along the way, look at the disasters that befell Joseph. Being sold to a caravan of traders. Being betrayed by Potiphar's wife on false charges. Thrown into prison. It seemed like nothing was going right for Joseph at times; that God's plan wasn't being accomplished. But all of it fit in to God's ultimate providential purposes for Joseph despite how seemingly disastrous it may have seemed.

As we trust in him, walk with him, and rely upon his power, we can have confidence that God's purposes for our lives will be accomplished.

Here a note of caution, I think, is necessary because I have come to understand that God's will for your life can include failure. When I say "nothing will defeat God's purposes" that doesn't mean you are going to be a success in everything you undertake. In a spiritual sense you can be a success, but in a worldly sense God may lead you into failure. The will for some Christians' lives is to suffer persecution and die in Iraq or in Syria under horrible conditions. For others it may be to lose your job or business position, or to be a failure as a pastor in a church. God's will for your life can include failure because he has things to teach you through failure that you would never learn through success. His long-range purposes may be accomplished through bringing failure and defeat and suffering into your life. But this is all under the providential plan and guidance of an omnipotent and sovereign God.

This is the central failing, I think, of the health and wealth gospel which says that if you just believe God that God is going to give you great success (in a worldly sense) in this life. That is a false gospel that is not promised biblically and it certainly is not true when you look at Christians around the world, many of whom are suffering terribly and die in horrible conditions because of their faithfulness to Christ. But what we can trust God for is that as an omnipotent provident governor of the world his providential purposes will not be thwarted. Therefore when we go through these difficult times of affliction and failure and defeat we go through them in the confidence that God is still on the throne and that his purposes will be done.

3. Finally, third (by way of summary), *God is adequate to all your needs*. We serve an omnipotent God. He is adequate to all of your needs. There is no prayer too hard, no need too great, no temptation too strong, no misery too deep but that God is not adequate to meet your needs in that situation.¹²⁵ We need to remind ourselves as we go through life that we serve an omnipotent God who, through the indwelling power of Christ works within us and through us to accomplish his will.

¹²⁵ 25:10

I want to just end this application section by quoting again from Ephesians 3:20-21:

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Could you comment on Romans 8:28 as an aspect of that? That all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. Even what seems to us to be irredeemably negative or bad can, in a way we can't predict or foresee, be used for good. You mentioned Joseph. Maybe the martyrdom of Stephen or John the Baptist, or Paul's thorn in the flesh.

Dr. Craig: Yes, Romans 8:28 says, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." Notice that that is a promise just for the elect – for those who love him and who are his elect. They can claim this promise, not non-believers who are separated from God and wandering in spiritual darkness. Their lives may go terribly wrong because they are not in God's will. But for someone who loves God and is part of the elect, the promise is that God will work everything for good. But when you read the context (and I know you recognize this) that doesn't necessarily mean good in this life. He goes on to say,

those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, . . . And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Ultimately, this good will be brought about in the afterlife in heaven as we are conformed to the image of Christ and given rewards and heavenly recompense. But in this life, as I say, for Christians living in North Korea or Lebanon or Syria, things may not look very good in that sense for them in this life. But God is at work even in those circumstances to ultimately bring about good as they are conformed to the image of Christ and then ushered into eternity where they will enjoy tremendous reward for their faithfulness.

Student: In support for your first point that God works within us, there is a very succinct verse, Philippians 2:13, "for God is at work in you, both to will and to act according to his good purpose." That word "will" - there is a little theological bombshell to a certain extent because we have free will – we know that – but it may well be that once you choose God . . . say you have a problem in your life you are trying to get rid of. I know I had to say, "God, just take the desire for that out of me. Take the will of that out of me." In that case it not only empowers us to act but actually changes our thinking, according to this verse.

Dr. Craig: Yeah, that is nicely said. In the context, this is right after his saying to them “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for God is at work in you” as you say. The promise of Romans 12:1-2 is that as we are committed to Christ, body and soul, he does transform our minds, doesn’t he? By the transformation of your minds so that you may prove the will of God. That is a good verse. Thank you for sharing that.

Student: In my own personal spiritual walk, and being with other Christians, sometimes it is easy for us to write off somebody as being too hardened or too far away from God. We’ll say God couldn’t change that person’s life. I think if we meditate on how powerful God is and realize that God can change anybody’s life around that we shouldn’t write off anybody. A person like a Richard Dawkins could, by the power of God who created the universe out of nothing, bring him to faith. I think that we shouldn’t write someone off like him.

Dr. Craig: A great biblical example would be Saul of Tarsus who was a persecutor of the early church. When he did come to faith in Christ the early Christians didn’t believe it.¹²⁶ They thought it was a subterfuge and that he was trying to get an inside position in the movement he was persecuting. You are right. Sometimes those who are most resistant and hardened may actually be closer to the Kingdom than someone who is indifferent and apathetic. That is a good reminder.

Student: I was just adding to your list Newton who wrote “Amazing Grace” would be an example (a slaver). Dr. Joad. C. S. Lewis.

Dr. Craig: Yes. That is right.

END DISCUSSION

The next section of the class is going to consider God’s moral attributes. Insofar as God is a person, we’ve looked at his intellectual attributes (his omniscience), his volitional attributes (his omnipotence), and now we are going to turn to a discussion of God’s moral attributes. We will explore the doctrine of the holiness of God and what implications that has for us.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ 30:02

¹²⁷ Total Running Time: 31:39 (Copyright © 2015 William Lane Craig)

Lecture 18: God's Holiness

We've been talking about the personal attributes of God. We looked at God's intellectual attributes, his volitional attributes, and today we want to turn to God's moral attributes. The first of these that we want to address is holiness – the holiness of God. We want to first begin by looking at some of the scriptural data concerning God's holiness.

1. *God is the very standard of goodness.* This, it seems to me, is the implication of Romans 9:14-21. There he talks about the call of God upon the lives of Jacob and the rejection of Esau.

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me thus?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?

Here Paul says that God's election is based upon God's own sovereign decision. He has mercy upon whom he wills; he hardens whom he wills. There is no higher court of appeal beyond God. One cannot bring God before the bar of some higher justice to say that this is unjust on God's part. Why? Because God is himself the highest court of appeal. God is himself the very standard of goodness and justice and righteousness. Therefore, he cannot be brought before any higher court of appeal or any higher bar of justice. God is not answerable to anyone because he is himself the standard of goodness and justice.

2. The Scriptures indicate that *God is absolutely holy*. Look at Exodus 3:3-5. This is the appearance to Moses on the part of God in the burning bush.

And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." When the LORD saw that he [Moses] turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

The presence of God made that hallowed ground so that Moses is told to take the shoes off of his feet because of the holiness of that place.

Leviticus 19:2: “Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.’” Here God’s command to the people is that his holiness should be reflected in their lives.¹²⁸ They should be holy because God himself is holy.

Finally, in the very last book of the Bible, in Revelation 4:8 we read:

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to sing, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

So God is absolutely holy. That then is the basis for the holiness that should characterize our lives.

3. *God’s holiness serves to expose man’s sinfulness.* Isaiah 6:1-5 is the vision of God that Isaiah had in the temple.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

Here the vision of God’s awesome holiness creates in Isaiah a deep sense of his own uncleanness and unrighteousness by comparison with God’s holiness. The awful purity of God serves to expose our own wickedness and inadequacy.

4. *God’s holiness separates man from God.* Look at the prophet Habakkuk, Habakkuk 1:13a. The prophet says of the Lord, “Thou who art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on wrong.” God’s eyes are too pure to behold evil. He cannot look upon wrongdoing because of his holiness. As a result, we (being wrongdoers and being unholy) are spiritually separated from him as a result. We cannot abide in his presence.

Isaiah 59:1-2 express this very well.

“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear.”

Here Isaiah says, *The problem isn't on God's part.* He is omnipotent. He is omniscient. He can hear your prayers. The failing isn't with God. It is that your sin and wickedness have created this separation between you and God so that he does not hear your prayers.

So the holiness of God serves to separate sinful man from God's fellowship and presence. God's holiness disperses evil just as light disperses darkness. They cannot abide together.¹²⁹

START DISCUSSION

Student: Is God above the law or is he subject himself to the law? Because if you look at what Christ said – *I didn't come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.* You also have other instances in Scripture where God seems as if he is submitting himself to his own law.

Dr. Craig: Let's hold that off until we get to the next section. Then we will discuss that. Certainly Jesus, as a man, was obedient to God's law because he had a human nature and perfectly fulfilled the demands of the law. The question would be: as a divine person, does God submit to his own law? I will say something about that more in a moment.

Student: God's holiness separates darkness from light. What I understand is that Jesus Christ brings us to him but he himself said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." Am I understanding that right?

Dr. Craig: That Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man?

Student: Absolutely. But you commented his holiness separates us from him because we are sinners. But then Christ himself being part of the Trinity helps us . . .

Dr. Craig: Yes, the Scripture says that we have redemption through the man Christ Jesus. By taking on human flesh and dying in our place he makes atonement for our sins so that breach between us and God can be healed and we can be forgiven of our sins and thus have fellowship with a holy God. Indeed, as we will see in a moment, we in Christ are constituted righteous and are declared to be righteous just like God. We will say something more about that in a moment.

Student: You said that God is the standard of holiness.

Dr. Craig: The standard of goodness.

Student: You've got these atheists that are always bad-mouthing God and they are very abusive toward God and his character – like Sam Harris just goes on a rant and tells us how terrible God is. This would be somewhat of an answer to that, right?

Dr. Craig: Yes, I do think that is correct. I think Paul, based on what he says in Romans 9, is that no one can indict God for wrongdoing. No one can cast aspersions on God's

character because God is himself the standard of right and wrong. There is no higher court, no higher bar of justice to which appeal can be made before which God could be brought. I think Paul would say to Sam Harris, *Who are you, a man, to answer back to God?* God is himself the highest court of appeal. That raises some really interesting questions, as we will see in a moment. But at least I think that that is the implication of that passage in Romans 9.

END DISCUSSION

Let's take a look at a systematic analysis of this attribute.

Here, as has already been suggested, we confront what is called the "Euthyphro Dilemma." The Euthyphro Dilemma is named after a character in one of Plato's dialogues named Euthyphro. The dilemma basically goes like this: "Does God will something because it is good or is something good because Gods wills it?" If you say that something is good just because God wills it then that makes good and evil arbitrary. God just makes up what is right and wrong, and he could have declared that hatred is good and love is evil. Then we would be morally obligated to hate one another, and to try to do one another harm. That seems crazy that good and evil, right and wrong, are just arbitrary like that. So it can't be the case that the good is just whatever God wills.

But then if you say, no, God wills what is good then the good is independent of God.¹³⁰ God lives up to the standard of goodness. What is good and evil is independent of God, and God always wills the right thing. He always wills the good thing. In that case God isn't the standard of justice and goodness. There is something beyond him to which God must conform. He has to, in order to be good, command things in line with what is good independently of him.

So the Euthyphro Dilemma has the implication that God cannot be the source of moral goodness. Either the good is independent of God and God just does what is good, or else good and evil are purely arbitrary and made up by God.

Christian philosophers, however, have exposed the Euthyphro Dilemma as a false dilemma. The two alternatives, despite first appearances perhaps, are not exhaustive. It is not as though you have to choose between A or not-A. This is like choosing between A and B, and there can be a third alternative C. In fact, in this case I think that neither of the two alternatives is correct, but they are not exhaustive. The correct alternative is to say, "God wills something because *he* is good." That is to say, God is the standard of goodness. God is what Plato called The Good. He is, by his very nature, fair, loving, kind, compassionate, truth-telling, loyal, and so forth. He has all of these virtues as part of his essence, and therefore these goods are anchored in the being of God. They are

goods because they are God's properties – God's virtues. God is The Good and he determines the standard of goodness. The Good is not something that is independent of God to which God conforms, nor is The Good based in God's will – in his arbitrary decision. Rather, God himself is The Good and he is that way by his very nature.

When God gives moral commands to us, these are expressions of his perfectly good nature. These become our moral duties so right and wrong (moral obligation and prohibition) are based in the commands of a just and loving God. Good and evil is determined by God's nature; right and wrong (our moral duties) are anchored in God's will which is an expression of that nature and therefore not simply arbitrarily chosen.

What that would suggest then, in response to the earlier question, is God is not beneath the law. That would be the view that God somehow conforms to an independent moral law that exists apart from him. Rather, here I think the philosopher Immanuel Kant made a very helpful distinction between acting from duty or acting according to duty. God issues moral commands to us that constitute our moral duties or obligations. We act from duty. Duty, or obligation, is imposed upon us. When we do these things we do our duty. We act from duty. But when God does them it is not as though he is acting from duty because presumably he doesn't issue commands to himself, right? So he doesn't have any moral duties in a literal sense, but because of his perfectly good nature he acts in accordance with what would be moral duty. We act from duty, but God out of his very nature simply acts in accord with moral duty. But he doesn't literally have moral duties because he doesn't issue commands to himself, and commands are the source of our moral obligations. Obligations arise as a result of moral imperatives: "Thou shalt do this," "Thou shalt not do that." These moral imperatives come from a qualified authority; namely, God who is goodness itself.¹³¹

This view of the relationship between God and The Good is sometimes called "divine command morality." That is to say, our moral duties are based in the commandments of God to us – they constitute our duties – but those commands are not arbitrary. That would be a sort of voluntaristic divine command theory which some Christian thinkers have held, but the majority would say, no, these commandments that he gives are expressions of his own essence. So it is impossible that God could have commanded, say, that hatred be good and love be evil because that would be to contradict his very essence. He is by nature loving and so to issue such a command would contradict his nature which is logically impossible as we've seen.

START DISCUSSION

Student: How then do you respond to those who do charge God with the very thing that you said he can't do which is give an immoral command when in the message today [earlier sermon], Paul [the Pastor] was talking about Joshua where they were commanded to commit genocide basically against a people while they were commanded to wipe out everything within the city walls of Jericho. The objection that I hear about this divine moral command is you have the Old Testament replete with such commands where they were to slaughter every living thing – child, woman, pet, whatever. What is the response then to that?

Dr. Craig: If you'll look on our website ReasonableFaith.org I have a couple of questions of the week where I wrestle with this issue.¹³² What I try to do there is to defend an ethical theory that would allow God to be perfectly good and all-powerful and yet to issue these sorts of horrifying commands such as to go in and kill everyone in the city – men, women, and children. I think that the theory that I've laid out here allows us to understand that because if God is the source of our moral duties, that means that God could command a person to do something which, in the absence of a divine command, would have been sin. But given the divine command, it now becomes the right thing for that person to do. If the armies of Israel, for example, had just decided on their own to go in there and slaughter the people, that would have been wrong. It would have been murder or war crimes. But given a divine command, they now have a moral duty to do that. Therefore, they have the obligation to carry out that command, horrifying as it might be. God doesn't have the ability to command a person to sin, but he has the ability to command a person to do an action which, in the absence of a divine command, would have been sin.

The question then is: is it incompatible with God's nature as an all-loving compassionate being to issue such a command? I would say, in this case, no. Because these Canaanite tribes that God commanded the armies of Israel to drive out of the land and those who tried to remain behind and fight were to be exterminated were incredibly wicked. For four hundred years, the Bible says, God had stayed his hand of judgment upon these Canaanite tribes because, he says to Abraham, the iniquity of the Canaanites is not yet complete. So he allowed his people Israel to languish for four centuries in Egypt until the iniquity of these Canaanite tribes became so ripe for judgment that God then used the armies of Israel as his means of visiting judgment upon these peoples for their

¹³² See the following (links accessed July 29, 2015): Q&A #16, Slaughter of the Canaanites, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/slaughter-of-the-canaanites> Q&A #225, The "Slaughter" of the Canaanites Re-visited, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-slaughter-of-the-canaanites-re-visited> Q&A #331, Once More: The Slaughter of the Canaanites, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/Once-More-The-Slaughter-of-the-Canaanites>

wickedness. He did nothing unjust in commanding the extermination of the adults, at least, in these Canaanite tribes because they were incredibly wicked and deserving of judgment. In the same way that centuries later God would use the pagan armies of Babylon to invade Israel and bring judgment upon his own people for their wickedness and evil.¹³³

The really difficult problem then, it seems to me, is the children. How is it consistent with God's nature that he would command these Canaanite children be killed. Here what I would say is that God doesn't wrong these children in taking their lives early. God has the right to give and take life as he sees fit. No one can say to God, *You should have let me live longer. I have a claim on a long life.* Many people do die in infancy. It is God's prerogative when to terminate a person's life. He has the right to take the lives of these Canaanite children whenever he wants to. Moreover, if you believe as I do (and I think as Jesus did), in the salvation of small children then by bringing the deaths of these children early God ensured their eternal salvation. In other words, he conferred upon them an incommensurable good – eternal life, knowledge of himself. Whereas if these children had been allowed to live, especially in Canaanite culture, they would have been infected with the same poison as the adults and most of them would have been lost. Their deaths would actually mean their salvation. Those children, once in heaven, would be grateful that God had issued such a command to the Israeli armies to wipe them out.

It seems to me that there isn't anybody that God has wronged in this case. The adults deserved the punishment. The children are delivered from evil and given salvation for eternal life. So no one is wronged in bringing about the command. It is not inconsistent with God's compassionate and loving nature to issue such a command.

One more thing I would like to say. Why would God do this? I think that by issuing so horrifying a command God gave an object lesson to the people of Israel about the necessity of separating themselves from pagan gods and peoples in a way that they could not have learned otherwise. The whole system of the Old Testament law is based upon separating things. Not eating certain foods, some things are clean, others are unclean, don't mix linen and wool, other things are not supposed to be mixed. Over and over again, these ritual laws in the Old Testament emphasize not mixing things but separating them. These were meant to be object lessons to the people of Israel that they were set apart by God as a peculiar people holy and dedicated to himself. As such, they were not to mingle or compromise with the pagan peoples of Israel's neighbors. I think that this horrifying command to go in and drive out these Canaanite tribes and to exterminate any that tried to stay behind was an object lesson that God gave them about the importance of being this separated people holy and dedicated and set apart to the Lord.

We know that even this lesson in the end wasn't infallible. In fact, they fell with tiresome repetitiveness into the error of absorbing the worship of the gods of their pagan neighbors and inter-marrying with Canaanites and other people. So even this lesson didn't infallibly produce its result. But it does seem to me that that would give God a good reason to issue such a command.

That would be my defense of these commands. It seems to me that there is nothing here that is incompatible with God's being all-powerful and all-loving and moreover that it fits in with the divine command theory of ethics where whatever God commands you to do becomes your moral duty to do.

Student: How does that though absolve God from the acts of the Israelis when I could say and you could say and people have said throughout the centuries, "I am commanded by God to enslave these people or to kill these people"?¹³⁴

Dr. Craig: I would say that it doesn't absolve God from what the Israeli armies did. On the contrary, they were his instrument. They were God's doing these things by the instrumentality of these armies. They were his means of judgment. Just as in the *Count of Monte Cristo* when Edmond Dantes seeks vengeance upon the three men who sent him into prison unjustly, he doesn't think of doing this out of personal animus or vengeance but he sees himself as the tool of God – the instrument of God – to bring about God's justice on these three men for their wickedness. In the same way, the armies of Israel are God's instrument by which he brings judgment on these people, in the same way that the pagan armies of Babylon centuries later were the instrument by which God judged his own people.

Now, the question you ask is one that people always ask – what about a jihadist? Muslim terrorists who say *God has given us this command to kill innocent men, women, and children in the name of Allah*. What about that? Doesn't this justify that? Not at all! Why? Not because the Muslim has the wrong moral theory, but because he has got the wrong god. Right? God has not issued those commands. He is worshiping a false god; a god whose character is vastly different from the God described in the New Testament. I actually think that the Muslim moral theory is correct so long as it is a divine command theory that is rooted in God's nature and not in his will. Islam tends to be very voluntarist. In Islam, Allah could act even contrary to his own nature. His omnipotence trumps everything. But insofar as the theory I've described is a divine command theory, that is not where I find fault with the jihadist. It is that he's got the wrong god. Of course this underlines all the more emphatically the importance that we are sure that we are worshiping and serving the right god, because if you are not you could be led into all manner of wickedness and terrible evil.

Student: One problem with the analysis is that we are told in several places in Scripture God is not a respecter of persons or God is not partial toward one person over another. You have two six month old children – one Israeli, one Canaanite – why would God treat them differently? My second point is: what do you think about the argument some people have made that the descriptions of the genocide of the Canaanite . . .

Dr. Craig: OK, let me just interrupt because both of you have used the word “genocide” and that is a pejorative label that opponents of the biblical view put on this. This is not genocide. It is not like what Adolf Hitler tried to do in the Second World War – exterminating a people. The command to the Israeli armies was to drive the Canaanite tribes out of the land. What he was doing was destroying these kingdoms as nation-states by divesting them of the land and giving it to Israel. It was now their land. This is what is so important to these Middle Eastern people – it’s the land. Even today when you go to Israel, Jews talk about going to “the land” – that is what they refer to Israel as. What was important here was that these tribes were now being divested of the land, they were being destroyed as nation-states by being driven out. It was only those that remained behind to fight that were to be killed and exterminated. There was no command to pursue these people and chase after them and wipe them all out. On the contrary, those who fled weren’t hunted down. They appear later on in the Scripture. This isn’t genocide. This is a command to drive the people out of the land and then only to kill those who remained behind in the land. That is terrible enough and horrible enough in itself, but it is not genocide. That is a real mischaracterization of this.

Student: So the two questions I had were first of all, the descriptions that God is not a respecter of persons, he is impartial.

Dr. Craig: Let me say something to that first because the time is waning and maybe you can save the second question for next week.¹³⁵ That is a verse from James where he is talking about differentiating between rich and poor and we shouldn’t treat people with partiality because of their importance or their richness and stuff. But Romans 9 says God will have mercy on whom he has mercy, he will have compassion on whom he has compassion. So God is not under obligation to prolong anybody’s life just because he is, say, Israeli or to take anybody else’s because he is not. I think we have to say that it is up to a sovereign God how many years he gives us on this planet until he terminates our life. But I want to add this: God’s will is that for every human person he creates to be saved. So he wants to create a world in which sufficient grace for salvation is offered to every created person. The only reason that anyone would have failed to attain heaven and eternal life is because they freely reject God’s grace and his every effort to save them. So

God is not partial in that sense. He bestows sufficient grace for salvation upon every person that he creates and wants every person to be saved.

END DISCUSSION¹³⁶

Lecture 19: Practical Application of God's Holiness

Last time we looked at the first of God's moral attributes – the holiness of God. I articulated a non-voluntaristic divine command theory of ethics according to which God is himself the highest good and is so essentially. His nature expresses itself toward us in the form of divine commandments which then constitute our moral duties. I suggested that this not only gives a satisfactory account of objective moral values and duties as grounded in God as the highest court of appeal, but it also enables us to understand in a consistent way the otherwise very troubling examples in Scripture where God commands people to do things which, if done under their own initiative, would have been sinful. I suggested that in cases like this God has the ability to command a person to do something which had he not commanded it would have been wrong. But given God's commandment it becomes that person's moral duty to carry out. I suggested that these commandments are always consistent with God's own perfectly loving and compassionate and just nature so we don't need to fear that God might completely upend the moral law and make hatred good and love evil, for example.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I had asked you last week one question about the different statements in Scripture that God is not partial toward one person as compared to another person. That is a theme, I think, you see throughout Scripture. It is in several places in the New Testament and Old Testament, also. I wondered how you would reconcile that with, for example, the commands to kill the Canaanite children and spare the Jewish children. That is one question. The other question I had was: what is your take on the position that some Christian philosophers have taken that the descriptions of the destruction of the Canaanites is hyperbole? Nicholas Wolterstorff (I think, a guy who spoke at one of your conferences here) and Matthew Flanagan argued that. Paul Copan, I think, argues that. What do you think of that position?

Dr. Craig: Let's take the second one first. This is a very appealing view – isn't it? – to say that God really didn't issue these commands. This is just hyperbole. For example, Paul Copan will give an illustration – when a high school basketball team says, "We slaughtered them last night," it doesn't mean they actually killed these people. It was just a hyperbolic way of saying they won. Paul claims that this is very typical in ancient near Eastern military accounts. The winner will say that they utterly annihilated the other side; they completely destroyed them. But it is not literally true. What some that you have mentioned would say is that these commandments should not be construed as literal commands to kill all of the men, women, and children that were remaining behind, and that in fact these commandments were not taken literally and were not fulfilled because

there are lots of Canaanites later on in the narrative that are still around, still alive, and in the land.

As I say, this is a temptingly attractive view because it makes it so easy to get God off the hook, so to speak, by saying this is hyperbolic. I hope it is right! I think that would be wonderful. But I am not persuaded that it is right. One reason is that when I look at the supposed parallel texts that are offered about military accounts in the ancient near East it seems to me that they don't approximate at all to the sort of commands that are given here in Scripture that seem to be so adamant about killing not only the people but the livestock and the other animals and so forth.¹³⁷ These are a lot different than statements by, say, the Egyptian Pharaoh that they utterly annihilated the enemy. I wish there were some more convincing parallels in extrabiblical literature to these commands that are obviously non-literal, and I haven't seen them. The other thing that disturbs me is in the account when Saul is supposed to kill the people off and the animals, the livestock, you will remember the prophet Samuel arrives on the scene and Saul hadn't done it. He hears the bleating of sheep and cows and so forth and says, *What is this? Why have you disobeyed the Lord? Why are these animals spared?* He reprimands Saul and makes him carry out the commands. There seems to be a pretty clear example that these commandments were meant to be literally carried out. Otherwise, it is hard to understand Samuel's displeasure at Saul's not doing it.

So I prefer to take the worst possible case. I often do this in apologetics. I say, "Let's assume the worst." Let's assume that these commands are literal and that this is exactly what God wanted them to do. Can we give a consistent and biblical account that will make sense of these ethical commands? I think that the account that I offered does so. If I am incorrect – if these aren't literal and they are merely hyperbolic – then I say all the better. That is great. I am open to be convinced. But even given the worst-case scenario I think we can show that there is no incompatibility between God's being a loving and just God and his issuing these commands.

As for partiality, as I said last week, the commands to be impartial or that says that God doesn't show partiality to persons isn't meant to imply that God treats all persons alike. I gave the example of Jacob and Esau from Romans 9 which we read earlier where he selected Jacob as the heir through which the line of promise would continue and Esau was rejected. God has the sovereign ability to do that. Not everybody is treated alike in life. Some people die young, others live to a ripe old age. Some suffer debilitating illnesses throughout their life, or poverty, or failure. Others have successful and prosperous lives. God isn't under any obligation to treat everybody exactly the same. Where I think God is impartial, and this is a reflection of my more Wesleyan theology, is

that I think God wants every person he creates to be saved. He doesn't arbitrarily pick out of the mass of humanity some elect persons to be saved and pass over the rest and let them go to hell. Rather, God gives sufficient grace for salvation to every person he creates and he wills and works for the salvation of every person that he creates. That, I think, is a fundamental impartiality on God's part but doesn't require that, as he works out his sovereign plan for human history, everybody's lot in life will be the same. God has the sovereign right to allow some people to die in infancy and others to live to a very old age and no one can claim that they have some sort of a right to a long earthly existence. There is nothing in God's promises that would say that they have a right to claim such a thing. Indeed, paradoxically, I would say that those who die young and go to heaven are really happier than those who struggle through this earthly life for many, many decades and finally go to be with the Lord.

Student: I would call to your attention Jesus' story of the rich man and the poor beggar Lazarus who sat at his doorstep. He tells about both of them dying and the rich man ends up in not a good place and the poor beggar ends up being comforted.¹³⁸ Jesus said, *In your life you had every good thing, now you are in torment. The poor beggar Lazarus had nothing and now he is being comforted.* If that is not making things right, I don't know what is. It just says that partiality doesn't mean just here. It means total partiality.

Dr. Craig: That is a very good point. We are so focused – aren't we? – on our finite existence here on this planet when compared to divine eternity this life is an infinitesimal eyeblink compared to the time we will spend in eternity with God. Those who suffer horribly in this life – say twenty-five years of debilitating cancer – in the afterlife will have this overwhelming reward that will make the sufferings of this life fade into an infinitesimal triviality by comparison. You are quite right in drawing our attention to the fact that our earthly state is just infinitesimally brief compared to the time that we will be with the Lord in eternity.

Student: I think it is a mistake to draw the conclusion that what we go through in this life is all we are going to go through. That is not true.

Dr. Craig: Right. That is exactly right.

Student: A number of bulletpoints jump into my head, but I will make it quick. Nobody complains about the flood, but sometimes God has to be God. If you want to take – and I agree with your approach on the worst case – but in mitigation you have situations of the intermarriage with these people that occupied the land, and going through the Kings and the Chronicles you see these people remained. So there were survivors from these groups. That would be the second point. The third point is, for the critics you have to have a

moral imprint to make a judgment about whether God is acting rightly or not. That begs the question – where does that come from?

Dr. Craig: Let me just comment on that very briefly because this is a good point. What you are saying is: how is the atheist or naturalist in any position to say that God has done something wrong here? Because apart from God how do you ground objective moral values and duties so as to say that God has done something that is wrong? On an atheistic view there isn't anything wrong with what those Israeli soldiers did. As one pastor – I think Douglas Wilson was his name who often dialogued with Christopher Hitchens – would put it, *The universe doesn't care*¹³⁹. In a morally neutral universe, it doesn't care who gets slaughtered and who doesn't. That is a good point.

How should we understand this objection then? I think the way to understand the objection is for the atheist to say *You Christians believe in God, and you believe that he is all-loving and all-just. Yet he issues these commands. You have an internal inconsistency in your system.* That is the way I would understand the objection – that biblical theism is internally inconsistent in affirming that there is a just and loving God and yet also affirming that he has issued these commands. What that means is all you have to do is provide a possible moral theory (a possible explanation) that would show there is no inconsistency. You don't need to show it is true. You just need to show it is possible. Then the inconsistency would be resolved. I noticed in my dialogue with Lawrence Krauss where he kept bringing this up that he didn't really understand even his own objection. Because at the end of the day, he was quite willing to admit, *Yeah, what you are saying is consistent but that doesn't mean it is true.* And I thought, *The man doesn't even get the objection that he is pushing himself.* The objection is an inconsistency claim. So all you have to do is offer a moral theory that will show there is no inconsistency between God's being all-powerful, all-loving, and all-just and issuing these commands. I think that that is what I've done.

Student: Also, one last point is in Hebrews it says Christ tasted death for every person. When I share the Gospel, if that comes up, I would share that God suffered his own alienation in Christ for everyone.¹⁴⁰ He suffered what it is like to spend eternity in hell for every man, woman, and child. That is why he had to be God because only God could do that.

Dr. Craig: When we get to the problem of evil, the problem of pain, we will talk a little bit about this more. I think this is useful in dealing with what I call the emotional problem of evil. I think that really is the problem for most people. It is not that they have an

¹³⁹ See Wilson vs. Hitchens debate transcript at <http://hitchensdebates.blogspot.com/2010/07/hitchens-vs-wilson-kings-college.html>

¹⁴⁰ 15:10

intellectual objection here that they can prove. It is just that they emotionally react to this. Your point is that we are worshiping and serving a God who is not some cool and distant Creator standing aloof and watching his creatures suffer. Rather, we are talking about a God who enters into human history in the person of Jesus. And what does he do? He suffers. He suffers a pain and torment that is literally beyond human understanding, and he takes this upon himself voluntarily for our sake and our salvation. I think emotionally that can make it easier to bear the cross that we are often called upon to bear in this life when we remember that we follow a crucified savior who gave himself for us.

Student: When God gave us free will he basically put a limitation upon himself as he divided the sea from the land. The water just does not surpass the boundary until in the case of Noah's flood that when everything that men think of are evil and there is no return and then God kind of comes in and restores it. That is almost like with all situations when sin becomes so rampant to a point there is not a turning force then he basically cleans up the pollution kind of thing. So if you call this a consistent model and God is not inconsistent in that way.

Dr. Craig: I think that is right insofar as one is dealing with adults who fall under God's judgment. These Israeli armies were merely the tool or instrument of God's judgment that he was meting out on them. The difficult question is the children, or to think of the story of Abraham's sacrificing his son Isaac. That is a pointed example as well. How can God command Isaac to go and kill his own son? Obviously he stops him before he can do it, but he does issue this command and expects Abraham to be obedient. The divine command theory that I have offered I think makes sense of that. Abraham, having been given this command, has a moral obligation to sacrifice Isaac even though had he undertaken such an action in the absence of a divine command would have been sin. It would have been wrong.

Student: Taking about the children, the Bible says the sin of the father passed down to third and fourth generation. So those children will be growing up in a curse because the sins of the fathers. So when I say they reach a point of no return that means that the generation down three or four generations is just no hope.

Dr. Craig: One might say that in the case of the Canaanite tribes.

Student: I agree with you that God was using them to judge, but mainly his purpose – he could have judged the sin with viruses or earthquakes or stuff like that.

Dr. Craig: Like Sodom and Gomorrah, for example – rain fire down upon the cities or something.

Student: A lot of people do not judge others for their fear of judging themselves. They have to acknowledge at some point judgment comes upon me. So when you are a people

that are following and trying to get close to God you know is loving and he commands you to do that he is talking about in your own life you only keep the goal when you are coming from a prior realm city of God which Jericho was. But when you are in a nation – your people who are descendants of Noah – that have totally come away then you don't keep anything.¹⁴¹ It is only like when you come out of Egypt you have no leaven for seven days. After that then you are able to let the Lord be fruitful and multiply you and bless you and grow you in other areas. Leaven is getting too far afield. You are not supposed to partake of anything that they had – their gods or anything. Making you do it is to force upon you – you only cling to God. That is your only hope.

Dr. Craig: I think you are making a very good point here. God could have carried out his judgment on the peoples of Canaan through some impersonal means like earthquake or weather or something of that sort and destroyed them. But he didn't do it that way. He chose to use Israel. Why? I think you are right. God had called Israel to be a holy people set apart for himself. There was an object lesson about the holiness of God in using them as the instrument of his justice and wrath upon these pagan peoples in the land – a lesson that wasn't to be overlooked. I think you are absolutely right that in calling upon Israel to be the instruments of his justice there was an object lesson for Israel that needed to be taught here and not simply judgment upon the Canaanites.

Student: How would you respond to, as far as divine command theory in today's day and age, people who (and I don't think that there is less than one percent of churches who have kind of a Westboro Baptist type philosophy) saying that this was commanded by God to kill these people or do this? How would you respond by saying that this is not happening anymore? How would you respond to somebody who would ask you a question of that nature today?

Dr. Craig: This is a very good point that you are making. Here I think Paul Copan's book alluded to earlier is very helpful – *Is God a Moral Monster?* What Paul rightly points out is that the Israelis were living in a theocratic state at that time. There was no human ruler – God was the head of Israel. These commands that were given were unique to this time and place in history where you had a theocracy – where God was the head of the government. But in the time of Jesus there was a Roman emperor who was the head of the government. As we know, Paul in Romans 13 says *be submissive to the governmental authorities. Do what they tell you to do.* The laws were different in that society than they were in ancient Israel. Similarly, the mistake of folks like the ones you mentioned are thinking that we live in a theocratic state today, and we don't. We are not the New Jerusalem. The United States is not God's people. We have a secular government and God is not the head of this government. It is a misnomer to think that our society will

have the same sort of laws that were provisional in ancient Israel. There simply is no way to translate from one to the other given that we have a totally different kind of civic society today.

END DISCUSSION

Let's move on to our application. What application does the attribute of God's holiness have to our lives? I think this is evidently of profound importance for Christian living.

1. *We should strive for personal holiness in our lives.* The holiness of God reminds us of how much God hates sin. Read the book of Revelation, for example, on the wrath of God. That is such a sobering reminder of God's hatred for sin and evil. For example, Revelation 14:18-20 gives this terrifying image of the wine press of the wrath of God.¹⁴²

Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has power over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God; and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia.

That is about two hundred miles! What a horrifying image this is of the wine press of the wrath of God flowing with the blood of its victims as high as a horse's bridle for two hundred miles. This is an image that should remind us of how much God hates sin and is opposed to it. One sin kept Moses out of the Promised Land. One sin destroyed Ananias and Sapphira. The problem I think that we have is that we blink at sin because we don't really think it is that bad. We think that God is like us, and he will simply wink at sin and overlook it.

Psalm 50:21 is an interesting verse in this connection. God is speaking here and he says, "These things you have done and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you." What was the problem the Jews had here? They thought that God was like them. They had small thoughts of God. They didn't understand his terrible and awesome holiness. So he had been silent and they thought it was all right. But now he says he rebukes them and lays the charge in front of them.

Having said that it is important to remind ourselves that God doesn't hate you; he hates your sin. God loves you. He loves you so much that he sent his Son to die for you. But he hates the sin that pollutes your life. Far from being something negative, the wrath of God which is an expression of his holiness is, I think, absolutely vital to a correct concept of

God and to Christian living. Stephen Davis is a prominent Christian philosopher. I was struck by this paragraph in his book *Risen Indeed*. He says,

I think we ignore the concept of the wrath of God at our own cost. Indeed, I would argue for the radical proposition that our only hope as human beings is the wrath of God. (It is also true, of course, that our only hope is the grace of God, but that is another matter). The wrath of God shows that we do not live, as so many today suppose that we do, in a random and morally neutral universe. God's wrath shows us that right and wrong are objectively real, they are to be discovered, not created. The wrath of God is our only hope because it teaches us the moral significance of our deeds and shows us how life is to be lived.¹⁴³

So don't be afraid to affirm the wrath of God upon sin. This is an indication of his holiness and, as Davis says, the objectivity of right and wrong which is our only hope in the world.

As those who are called to a righteous and holy life, *we need to strive for lives without blemish*. 1 Peter 1:14-16: "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" We are to strive for holiness in our lives which reflects the holiness of God. To live lives that are without blemish.¹⁴⁴

Here is the paradoxical thing that we've discovered that I think is such an incredible irony or paradox of God's economy. That is that *holiness is the secret to happiness*. So many people want to be happy. They will compromise morally or do things that the Bible says you shouldn't do because, as they put it, *I just want to be happy*. But the truth of the matter is that happiness is like a will-o'-the-wisp. If you seek it directly – you try to be happy – it will always elude your grasp and you won't find it. But if you strive for holiness then in seeking to be holy you will suddenly discover that happiness has crept up on you and is sitting there on your shoulder because you are doing the will of God. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." We need to make it the focus of our lives to seek for God's holiness in our lives. I really do believe that as we do that we will find that we are living lives that are deeply and profoundly happy.

That is the first application.

¹⁴³ Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), p. 166.

¹⁴⁴ 29:57

The second application is that *in Christ God's holiness becomes our justification*. For those outside of Christ, as we have just seen, God's holiness is an awful terror. It is the source of the justice and the wrath of God which comes upon people who are separated from him and apart from Christ. But, ironically, for those who are in Christ, God's holiness becomes the source of their salvation. This was Martin Luther's great insight into Romans 1:16-17. Let's just read Romans 1:16-17:

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed though faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."

Luther, as a Catholic monk, was obsessed with the holiness and the wrath of God which filled him with terror. He strove to live a holy and righteous life full of spiritual disciplines. But he could never rid himself of the terrible guilt that he felt he carried before a holy God. He realized he could never measure up. Despite his every effort, Luther was filled with terror before this holy God, until he saw that through faith in Christ the righteousness of God becomes our righteousness. As I am in Christ, his righteousness is imputed to me, and God sees me clothed in the righteousness of Christ himself. So that very holiness that once condemned me now becomes the source of my salvation.

Romans 3:21-26, I think are some of the most profound verses in the New Testament – the heart of the Gospel. I will close by reading those.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies [or makes righteous] him who has faith in Jesus.¹⁴⁵

Lecture 20: God's Love

We've been studying the moral attributes of God and have concluded the section on God's holiness. Today we want to turn to the other facet of God's moral character, and that is God's love. If God were simply a God of justice and not a God of love then we would be in deep trouble! So we are very grateful to be able to study not only the holiness and justice of God, but also God's wonderful love. Let's look at some scriptural data concerning God's love.

First of all, the Scriptures indicate that *God's nature is loving*. God is essentially loving. 1 John 4:7-21:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us. If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.

Notice that according to John the love of God is not something that is adventitious to God – a contingent property that God simply happens to exhibit. It belongs to the very essence of God – God is love. So love is of the divine nature and is manifested toward us. So God is not only a God of holiness and justice, but he is also a God of love. As one author has said, "Thank God for God!" that God is like that.

Secondly, *God's love is unconditional*. That is already indicated in the passage that we just read. God loves us not because we loved him, but because he first loved us. So God's love is not contingent upon our loving him first. His love is unconditional.

But this isn't a New Testament peculiarity. This is also true of God's love expressed in the Old Testament toward his people Israel. Look at Deuteronomy 7:7-8 where God describes why he chose Israel as his own.¹⁴⁶ He says,

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the LORD loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Here the Lord says it is not something about Israel that made them particularly lovable or worthy. It is simply God's sovereign choice. He simply has chosen them. He loves them. There wasn't anything about Israel that made it particularly worthy of God's love. God's love is unconditional.

This same truth is taught in the New Testament. For example, look at Ephesians 2:4-5, Paul's letter to the church of Ephesus. Paul says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Here Paul says even when we were spiritually dead in our sins, God loved us with this great love, and then made us alive in Christ. This is an expression of his grace, his unmerited favor toward us. It is God's unconditional love.

Finally, look at the letter to Titus – Titus 3:3-5, which is one of the richest passages in the New Testament, I think. There Paul says,

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.

Notice what Paul says here. The goodness and loving kindness of God is exhibited toward us not because of deeds of righteousness that we had done but simply in virtue of his own mercy. It is simply an expression of the unconditional love of God. The word here for loving kindness is *philanthropia* from which we get our word "philanthropic." It

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is the will or the love of God toward people. God loves people. Therefore, he has sought to extend his grace to us and save us. So the first quality that we want to highlight of God's love is its unconditional nature.

Secondly would be *God's love is immutable*. It is changeless. God is not going to withdraw his love from you at some point in the future. Jeremiah 31:3 speaks of God's unchanging love. There the Lord says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you." So God is not going to get tired or fed up with us and withdraw his love. His love will not grow old and stale. It is an everlasting love that he has extended to us.

Finally, *God's love is universal*. It is not extended just to some persons, but it is universally extended. John 3:16, Jesus says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Notice that the object of God's love here is not his people. It is not the church. It is not the elect. It is "the world." It is the unbelieving world of people that Christ has come to save that God loved so much that he sent his only Son to die for them.¹⁴⁷ This is a universal love that is extended to every person that God creates.

So God's love is unconditional; it is immutable; it is universal.

What might we say about the love of God? I think what we want to say is that God's love is a peculiar type of love which the New Testament authors refer to as *agape* love. This is not the ordinary sort of love that human beings exhibit one toward another. This is a word that is used to describe God's love which is this unconditional, impartial, universal love that is extended to humanity. God's character is such that he is as loving as he is holy. Neither of these can be compromised. They are equally attributes that belong to the very essence or nature of God. God is as loving as he is holy.

This, of course, leads to a great paradox. It means that God loves the sinner just as intensely as he hates his sin. God hates his sin because it violates the holiness of God. Yet, God loves the person who is perpetrating and guilty of that sin. Romans 5:8 says the following: "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This is the remarkable thing about God's love – it is extended not toward those who are redeemed, who are his people, who have sought his grace. It is extended to the enemies of God – to people who are sinners and who have their faces opposed to God. It is those that God loves so much that he sends Christ to save them.

I think that we have a tendency to soft-pedal this. We don't understand this kind of love. We think surely there must be something about us that makes us lovable that would prompt God to love us. So we tend to portray lost people as little lost lambs that are

wandering from the fold of God, and God reaches out to bring back these little lost lambs that are innocently straying from the fold. We don't understand that in the scriptural view, we are not innocent lost victims. We are hateful rebels who have opposed God to his face and who shake our fists in his face in opposition to him. That is why Paul refers to us as enemies of God. When we were enemies of God, Christ came and died for us. Yet that is the tremendous truth in this paradox. As sinful and opposed to God as we are, as unworthy of his love as we are, nevertheless God loves us just as intensely as he hates our sin.

So it is the love and the justice of God together which prompt his redemption and which motivate us to seek God and to find him. I remember very well as a non-Christian when I first heard the Gospel of Christ, I was overwhelmed by the message of God's love. The thought that the God of the universe could love a worm down there on that speck of dust called planet Earth like Bill Craig just overwhelmed me. It staggered me to think that the God that created the entire universe could love me. Yet at the same time, I realized that, as a sinner whose heart was black, I stood under the condemnation and the wrath of this holy and just God who loved me. Together these brought me to Christ. The love of God drew me but the justice and holiness of God impelled me into Christ's arms.¹⁴⁸ The love and justice of God work together to bring people to Christ.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I've listened to many Roman Catholic theologians talking about God's love. Sometimes they talk as if . . . when they quote 1 John saying "God is love" they say that God is what God is at his very core and essence, and everything else flows out of that. So God's holiness flows out of the fact that God is love. God's power flows out of the fact that God is love. God's knowledge flows out of the fact that God is love. So God is the foundation and all the other attributes are kind of the out-growing or the flower of that. I just wanted to know what you would think about that?

Dr. Craig: I don't see that at all in the passage. I think what John is saying is that love belongs to the essence of God, but clearly the property being loving is not the same as the property of being holy or just. In fact, they would seem to be opposites in many ways. A person who is perfectly, implacably just will not show mercy or love. They are in one sense opposed to each other. That is why we have this paradoxical situation. Similarly, there are other properties of God like his spirituality or his incorporeality or his omniscience or his eternity that are not expressions of his love. These are just different properties. So I would say that God has quite a number of essential attributes that belong to his very nature and it is overly simplistic to try to reduce them all to one attribute and see the others as flowing out of it.

Student: I was going to get your response to . . . we say God's love is unconditional but how is that not universalism, for example, and how can we say that it is unconditional when salvation is conditional upon faith, for example?

Dr. Craig: When I say it is unconditional I mean that there are no conditions that a person has to meet in order for God to love him. I think that is straightforwardly true. God loves not only the elect; he loves the damned, as well. He loves those who reject him and reject his grace and separate themselves from him forever. I do not think we should compromise the love of God by saying God doesn't really love the non-elect or he doesn't really love the people who reject him and separate themselves from him forever. It seems to me that the testimony of the New Testament is that God loves the world and as the Scriptures says he is not willing that any should perish but that he wants all persons to come to a knowledge of himself. So I think his love is unconditional.

Now salvation has conditions on it. That is true. Salvation requires a response of faith on the part of the person who has to accept God's grace, but that is not to say that God's love is conditional for that person. So don't confuse those two, I would say.

Student: I was just going to make a comment about God's love. It is also very clear in Scripture that he disciplines those he loves. If you read in Hebrews 12:7-8:

It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

I think it is clear that we get a – this is probably not the best word to use – a judgment of sorts by God, at least in this life, in order to discipline us.

Dr. Craig: Yes, it says that his discipline is because of his love. If he didn't discipline us then he wouldn't be a loving parent. A loving parent isn't one who lets the child just run rampant and doesn't try to shape that child to have a moral mature character. That is a good reminder.¹⁴⁹ It also reminds us, I think, of the fact that suffering is not incompatible with God's love. I had thought that that would be something that one might raise in connection with this lesson, though I chose not to – namely, the problem of suffering. If you say God loves us in the way you've described then how can he allow such horrible suffering to come into the lives of people, and even his own children. I think your reminder is a good one. Love is not inconsistent with suffering at all. There may be discipline that needs to be taken by God as a loving heavenly Father that will ultimately be for our own good if we respond to it in the right way.

Student: One more quick comment as far as the universality of his love. I don't know which verse it is – I believe it is in the Gospel of Matthew where Christ says “the rain falls on the righteous and unrighteous alike.”

Dr. Craig: Yes, I am going to say something about that verse later in the application section.

Student: I was thinking about the problem of distinguishing a Christian who really is acting morally because of being receptive to God's grace versus the non-Christian who is just acting decently because they have a decent nature but aren't really in submission to God. To parse those two, I was thinking about what makes the Christian receptive to grace in a way that a non-Christian who has loved and who has seen evidence of God in the world but doesn't consciously rebel but simply doesn't believe or is of a different religion or something like that. What separates these?

Dr. Craig: That is very difficult to answer. With respect to Christians, at least, there is this poignant saying by Jesus that he who has been forgiven much loves much. Those who have been saved out of a life of conscious sin will often have a sort of love for God that is deeper than the person who is, as you say, just sort of always dutifully lived the externals of the Christian life. I think that is one reason that having a healthy robust doctrine of sin is really very helpful for us spiritually. Because we are all wretched miserable sinners. Even the best of us – all of us – ought to fall under that category of he who has been forgiven much. But we often don't realize it because we think we are rather decent chaps after all if we haven't done gross sins. But a robust doctrine of sin should help us to respond to God with a deeper love and devotion if we really understand how much we've been forgiven.

With respect to the non-believer, why is it that the non-believer doesn't have that deep sense of sin and need of forgiveness? I think if the unbeliever really did grasp how morally wretched he is and that God has sent Christ to die to forgive him that might evoke in that person a deeper sense of the love of God. But without that deep consciousness of sin, I doubt that people will really come to know Christ and serve him. You've got to have that sense of your own need first.

That is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture says that God sends the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. Unfortunately some people resist the Holy Spirit. They don't allow him to convict their hearts. They suppress or repress the Spirit. I was just reading this week Stephen's speech in the book of Acts prior to his martyrdom. He said of the Jewish leaders of his day, “You hard-necked people. . . . You always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51). That seems to be what many unbelievers do. So they do not have this deep sense of need or of the love of God for them that would

evoke love in their own hearts. That is about the best I can do in response to that question.¹⁵⁰

Student: You might say God's love is expressed even to the unbelievers because he doesn't annihilate them – they have a life, they get to be their own god into eternity, and suffer that alienation. Satan said to Adam and Eve in the garden, *You will be like gods. You'll know good and evil.* Part of that was true, but he didn't tell them the result of that was they would know separation. God knew separation first when he separated Satan and the angels from himself. So they get the full circle of that situation, but they are not annihilated. That was one thought that came to mind on this.

Dr. Craig: We will talk more about the fate of the damned after death. Some people believe in annihilationism. They would think that that would be an extension of God's mercy, actually, to annihilate the damned rather than allow them to suffer forever. We will come back to that question when we get to the state of the soul after death and the doctrine of the last things. I am inclined to see the doctrine of hell as an expression of God's justice and holiness rather than an expression of his love. I see heaven and salvation as the expression of God's love, and hell as the expression of his wrath and justice and holiness.

Student: The other thought I had was if we say – and I agree that God's love is an attribute rather than something substantial, because if we say God is love then as A. W. Tozer pointed out the flip side would be *love is God* and that is not true substantially.

Dr. Craig: Yeah, it is not an identity statement. The word “is” here is not an “is” of identity. As Clinton says, it all depends on what the meaning of the word “is” is. *[laughter]* For example, you could say “Cicero is Tully.” That is to say, that is an identity statement. Those were two names of the same person. But if you say, “Cicero is the greatest Roman orator,” that is not an identity statement. That is a predication. It is ascribing a property or an attribute to Cicero. Similarly here, as you say, when John says “God is love” he is not making an identity statement. He is making a predication that God has the property of love essentially. It belongs to the nature of God.

Student: I am trying to understand this whole love thing. Going to the very beginning when there was nothing except God, I am trying to understand the point of love. Is there really a point to it? As I think through it, there is a triune God so it goes around. It is my understanding now the triune God always existed because I am looking at verses where Christ was begotten. It sounds to me like there was a beginning to the triune God.

Dr. Craig: The classic doctrine of the begetting of the Son is that it is eternal. It is like the sunshine from the sun. The sun never exists without its rays. Obviously, the sun doesn't

come from the rays. The rays come from the sun. Similarly, the church fathers said that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father.

Student: I guess that is what I needed to be reminded of. Thank you.

Dr. Craig: We will talk about this when we get to the doctrine of the Trinity because this is a very important point that has been made here. If I am right that love is of the very essence and nature of God then when there was nothing (when there were no human beings to love) then whom did God love? There isn't anybody else to love other than God.

Student: That is exactly what I was trying to understand. If there was no Trinity and there is just the Father then what is the point of love?

Dr. Craig: And this is, I think, a very good argument for a plurality of persons within God over against Unitarianism which says that God is just one person. For example, Islam is a form of Unitarianism. There is just the one person that is God. But if God is essentially loving, it is of the nature of love to give oneself away to the other.¹⁵¹ A Unitarian God cannot do that; cannot be essentially loving. This gives, I think, a very persuasive reason for thinking that there is a plurality of persons within God himself so that within the godhead there are eternal love relationships that have existed forever and now are manifested toward human beings with the creation of the world. We will get back to that when we get to the Trinity. But I think you've seen a very important implication of the notion that God is essentially loving. It suggests a doctrine of the Trinity.

END DISCUSSION

Next time we will look at some practical application of this attribute of God's being loving to our own lives.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ 30:05

¹⁵² Total Running Time: 31:25 (Copyright © 2015 William Lane Craig)

Lecture 21: Practical Application of God's Love

Today we want to bring to a close a major section of our Defenders class – dealing with the attributes of God. We are going to look at an application of the moral attribute of God – his love. We saw in the lesson last time that God exhibits *agape* love – universal, unconditional, impartial love. Even while we were hateful enemies of Christ, God loved us and sent his Son to win us back to himself.

What application might we draw from this attribute of God's love?

1. We should *bathe in the sunshine of God's love for us*. Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul writes,

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

What an incredible description of our union with Christ. We are rooted and grounded in love. Paul asks that we might know the depths of the extent – the height – of Christ's love for us, love which he says even surpasses knowledge. For all the knowledge that we might acquire, the love of Christ surpasses that. That is the love that we have as we are in Christ. We need to revel in that. We need to bathe in that love that God has shown toward us.

There is no fear in this sort of love as we read in 1 John 4:18. It says, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.” Remember we saw that the holiness or the justice of God is equally essential to God as his love and his grace. Fear of God springs out of that terrible holiness and justice. But for the one who is perfected in love he need not fear God anymore because in Christ we are his beloved and all of God's love is showered upon us.

Paul says that there is no separation from God's love that he has exhibited toward us in Christ. Romans 8:35-39 says:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So insofar as we are in Christ we are invulnerable to these perils and attacks upon us.¹⁵³ Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ. The only person who can separate you from the love of Christ is yourself if you separate yourself from him by rejecting his love. Jude 21 tells us, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." What an interesting exhortation from Jude – keep yourself in the love of God.

In the book of Revelation, chapter 2, we are reminded that we need to review ourselves (assess ourselves) to see if we are holding to our first love, or if we have begun to cool in our love and commitment to Christ. In Revelation 2:4-5 the angel says to the church in Ephesus:

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first.

We need to review our lives to see if we are holding to our first love, or if our ardor has begun to wane as we have grown older in Christ. Then return to that first love and keep ourselves in the love of God as Jude tells us to do.

So we need to bathe and revel in the sunlight of God's love for us.

2. *God's love then becomes the basis for our self-love.* God's love of us is the basis for our love of ourselves. You'll remember we saw in our discussion of divine omniscience that God knows everything about you. There is no skeleton in the closet, no hidden sin, no secret fault that he does not already know. Yet he loves you unconditionally and unconditionally. God loves us despite everything that is wrong with us. That provides the basis for self-love. If God loves you that much then why can't you accept yourself? On the basis of God's love for you – if you believe what God says – then you can accept yourself and these feelings of inferiority and failure and guilt ought to be driven out because if God loves you that much you should be able to accept yourself as well and fight against those emotional vestiges perhaps of an unhappy childhood or a dysfunctional home or other influences that have left it difficult for you to accept yourself and to love yourself in the way God wants you to. That is the second point – a deep realization of God's love for us can be the basis for our own self-love and self-acceptance in a healthy way.

3. Finally, *God's love is the basis for our love of others in turn.* 1 John 4:19-21 makes this point. John says,

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.

On the basis of God's love filling our lives, this should then be extended toward others. We need to forgive others who have wronged us and to love them with the love that God gives to us.

Matthew 5:43-48 – the Sermon on the Mount – talks about the kind of love that Christ calls upon us to exhibit.¹⁵⁴ Jesus says,

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Just as God loved us while we were yet enemies, so here Jesus says you shall love your enemies. Love those who hate you and persecute you and use you – we are to love them. Notice that he says if you only love those who love you you are no better than these execrable Roman collaborators – the tax collectors – who were regarded as traitors by the Jews. Or you are just like a Gentile whom the Jews thought of as dogs. Jesus is saying that you've got to have more love than the kind of love that even these people exhibit. Your love needs to be love like the heavenly Father. It is on the basis of the realization that God's love was directed to us while we were yet hateful and enemies and rebels against him that we can ask him to give us that love for those who oppose us and hate us as well.

It has been said that love is measured by service and service is measured by sacrifice. Look at God's example. Look at the depths to which he was willing to go for our sake in becoming incarnate as a man, taking on the limitations of human existence, and then becoming a sacrifice for sin, bearing incomprehensible pain undeserved innocent suffering, simply for our sake because he loves us so much. Christ's example is the example of this self-giving sacrificial love. So we need to look for opportunities, I think,

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again to be intentional about this. Andrea and Eric are going through this terrible surgery and are going to be needing service. They are going to be needing help during her recovery. Will we step up to the plate and sign up on this list that Stephanie is putting together or will we be apathetic and indifferent and say we will let others do it? This requires intentionality and effort. But, as I say, the depth of one's service and the sacrifice you are willing to make is going to be a measure of the love that you are to exhibit toward others, especially to the brethren.

Those are some thoughts about an application of God's love in our lives.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I would like to make a comment or a testimony-type deal. At work, like you said, going out and trying to find somebody to minister to, I remember my brother challenged me to it saying, *You need to find somebody to go ahead and evangelize to.* I've never done that. I kind of just prayed before asking for somebody to come up to me, and I would reach out to them then. He challenged me, *Why don't you just go up to Walmart, find a person who is maybe disabled in a way, and help them take their cart to the car and minister.* So I said OK. That night I prayed, but God led me to do it at work. I hardly ever went out with anybody for lunch. I just kind of went home or had my own. Now I just go out to do lunch with somebody once a week. Just last week I happened to find another person I could reach out to and have a conversation.¹⁵⁵ Hopefully I can invite this friend of mine next week to this class. That is just how it works. It is really that simple. Just go. Things work out for the best.

Dr. Craig: Thank you.

Student: The church has emphasized a lot of come-and-see ministry. Even our church. We do a lot of foreign missions, but part of the Gospel is go-and-tell, not necessarily come-and-see. It is sad that we don't have any visitation. If we have a barbecue you have 500 people. If you say you are going to knock on some doors in the neighborhood and give them a church brochure you will have about 20. This is what you have to do. It is all aspects of that. To have tools with you, evangelism bracelets, a tract, a good card that has Christian movies on it, and things you can carry with you. It is amazing how many conversations get started when you do that. You've got to have both go-and-tell and come-and-see.

Dr. Craig: I've never heard it put that way before, but that's nice.

Student: We used to say from the announcements up at the front, *If you fill out your connection card we won't knock on your door* – that is exactly what we should be doing – going and knocking on the door. Very few people resent that when you do it. That is just

some input. I think intentionality is important. That is why mission trips are good. There are a lot of people that have never gone on one. The intentionality in providing a time or situation or looking for those situations, God will reward you if you show up.

Dr. Craig: Amen.

Student: First is just a comment on God's love. Maybe it is just my experience but I have to rely on God's love through me because it seems as if it is so difficult – me and my own sin nature – to love the way he wants us to love. I find I become judgmental or critical. That is so foreign to him. I have to really focus on pushing back my sin nature so that his love will come through. If you are successful (and hopefully through prayer you can be) it is a whole different experience.

Dr. Craig: The Christian life cannot be lived in the power of the flesh, can it? It needs to be through the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Student: I don't know that in this life we can fully constantly do that. It just takes the Holy Spirit and you have to really, I think, rely on that and to just focus on it. That's just one thing. The other thing I wanted to mention is that my daughter uses this approach in reaching others that I think is excellent. She says, *By the way, is there anything I can pray for you about?* That kind of opens the door, even if it is a non-Christian or whatever. It lets them know where you are coming from. Then sometimes they will say, *Well, as a matter of fact;* and then it just opens the door. I thought that was an excellent tool I wanted to share.

Dr. Craig: Yes, that is a nice opener.

Student: What is your take on the practical application of “love your enemies” in an ISIS world?

Dr. Craig: I differentiate between what you as an individual have the right to do and what the state has a right to do and the agents of the state. When an armed service member kills a person that is in ISIS, he is not acting on his own personal initiative. He is acting as an agent of the state. He is authorized by the state to conduct warfare on behalf of the state. Paul says in Romans 13 with regard to the Roman emperor, “He does not bear the sword in vain.” Rather, he is God's instrument to execute justice. We need to be sure that the wars that we engage in are just wars. But then if they are it seems to me that one is entirely morally justified in resisting the enemy with violence and trying to defeat the enemy by violent means.¹⁵⁶

END DISCUSSION

With that, let me bring our lesson to a close because I want to conclude this section of the class.

We have now surveyed some of the principal attributes of God. I hope that it has served to expand and magnify your concept of who God is. God is not only infinite, self-existent, eternal, omnipresent, and immutable, but he is also personal, omniscient, omnipotent, holy, and loving. What a God God is, the God that we worship. Before the creation of the world, when God alone existed, God knew and planned to take on human flesh and to enter human history as a man for our sake and for our salvation. And he did this because he loves us so much and would do this to win ourselves to him. The infinite God loves you that much.

I want to conclude with the words of Charles Spurgeon with which we began:

The proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.¹⁵⁷