

*The*  
Attributes  
*of*  
God

R.C. SPROUL



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

*Renew your Mind.*

[www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org)

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First printing, September 2000

Printed in the United States of America

# Introduction

In the Book of Proverbs we read, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). In order to fear God, however, we must know something about who He is. A desire to know more about our God should be the desire of every Christian. Yet we must never seek such knowledge with the wrong motivation. The study of the nature and attributes of God is one of the most awe-inspiring studies any human being can engage in, but the depths of the subject have led many to be puffed up in their minds and filled with pride.

As a Christian begins to learn more about the nature and attributes of God, his response should be humble adoration, praise, and worship. The knowledge of God gained by the Christian cannot be an end in itself. It is to draw closer to God in loving faith. There are millions today who, like the ancient Athenians, are worshipping an “unknown god.” The Christian is not to be one of them. The Christian is called to know God, to love God, to fear God, and to worship God.

May this series enable you to continue growing in the knowledge and fear of the living God.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R.C. Sproul". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

R.C. Sproul

# 1

## Ice Cream Cones & The Study of God

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Who is God, and how do we as finite human beings conceive of Him? In this lesson, Dr. Sproul explores the ways in which believers think about God. He introduces the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God and the nature of human language as it attempts to meaningfully express the nature of God.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the limited nature of our images of God.
2. To be able to define the doctrine of God's *incomprehensibility*.
3. To introduce the idea of *anthropomorphic language*.
4. To understand the importance not merely of knowing about God, but of knowing God Himself.

### QUOTATIONS

*We know God but as men born blind know the fire: they know that there is such a thing as fire, for they feel it warm them, but what it is they know not. So, that there is a God we know, but what He is we know little, and indeed we can never search Him out to perfection; a finite creature can never fully comprehend that which is infinite.*

— Thomas Manton

*There is infinitely more in God than the tongues of men or angels can express.*

— Thomas Brooks

### LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. Introduction — The Ice Cream Cone Game

1. Close your eyes and try to imagine a visual image of your favorite kind of ice cream cone.
2. What kind did you imagine?
3. The point of this game is to see that we can, in fact, create mental images in our mind's eye.

B. The Game — Part Two

1. Close your eyes and think in terms of concrete images; what do you visualize when you think of God the Father?
  - a. The image from the Sistine Chapel
  - b. Light
  - c. A rainbow
  - d. A shepherd
  - e. Christ
2. This experiment has been done in numerous settings with different age groups and different types of people, yet it is difficult to discern a difference in the types of answers people give.
3. When it comes to our ability to imagine the character of God and to think concretely about God, humans tend to think alike.

C. Examining the common answers from the Game

1. An old man on a throne — Many have this image, but do we believe that God really is an old man like the image on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? No.
2. Light — Although this is a common biblical image, is God identical with light? No.
3. A rainbow — The rainbow is a sign of God's covenant with Noah, but is God a rainbow? No.
4. A shepherd — This too is a biblical image that communicates aspects of God's character, but do we believe that God is a literal shepherd? No.
5. Christ — Jesus does say that those who have seen Him have seen the Father, but Christ is not identical with the Father.

- D. What do we learn from this experiment?
1. Whatever image we have of God the Father cannot comprehensively grasp His essence.
  2. Yet all the images we have suggest something that is meaningful about God to us.
  3. This is important because when we begin the study of God, the very first thing we teach under the heading of “theology proper” is the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God.
    - a. The term “incomprehensibility of God” can be somewhat misleading.
    - b. It does not mean that we have no way of knowing anything about Him.
    - c. It means that no human mind can fully comprehend all that God is.
    - d. It means that our knowledge is not exhaustive.
- E. The doctrines we learn are expressed in concepts; concepts are expressed in words; and these words are symbols.
1. The word “God” is a symbol.
  2. Neither the word “God” nor the vocal sound “God” captures God.
  3. God is not the word “God.”
  4. Even our true statements about God are not God.
  5. What we want to do ultimately in our study of theology is not just to know about God, but to know God.
- F. The one common thing among all the images people come up with is that they are anthropomorphic.
1. Anthropomorphic language is language communicated in human forms.
  2. All of our language about God is anthropomorphic because we are *anthropoi* — human beings.

**STUDY QUESTIONS (MULTIPLE CHOICE)**

1. The point of R.C.’s “Ice-Cream Cone” Game is to see that we can, in fact, create \_\_\_\_\_ in our mind’s eye.
  - a. Theological concepts

- b. Mental images
  - c. Comprehensive concepts of God
  - d. Anthropomorphic language
2. Having done the “Ice Cream Cone” exercise with numerous groups, R.C. concludes that when it comes to our ability to imagine the character of God and to think concretely about God, we have a tendency to be somewhat \_\_\_\_.
- a. Alike
  - b. Abstract
  - c. Different
  - d. Vague
3. The very first thing we teach under the heading of “theology proper” is the doctrine of the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
- a. Infinity
  - b. Inconceivability
  - c. Holiness
  - d. Incomprehensibility
4. “Incomprehensibility” means \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. No human mind can fully comprehend all that God is.
  - b. Man has no way of knowing anything about God.
  - c. Man’s knowledge of God is real but inadequate.
  - d. Man’s knowledge of God is comprehensive.
5. The doctrines we learn are expressed in \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Symbols
  - b. Anthropomorphisms

- c. Concepts
  - d. Analogies
6. The word “God” is \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. An Anthropomorphism
  - b. Incomprehensible
  - c. A symbol
  - d. All of the above
7. Even our true statements about God are not \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. God
  - b. True
  - c. Adequate
  - d. Analogous
8. \_\_\_\_\_ language is language communicated in human forms.
- a. Symbolic
  - b. Anthropomorphic
  - c. Anthropological
  - d. Metaphorical

**BIBLE STUDY**

1. What are some of the more common biblical images of God? Provide specific examples.
2. What is the basic truth communicated by each of these images? Where does the analogy between the image and God break down?
3. What does Jesus mean when He tells Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9)?
4. How do we know from Scripture that the incomprehensibility of God does not mean that God cannot communicate truth about Himself to man?

5. What do the following Scriptures have to say about the difference between knowing about God and knowing God Himself?
  - a. John 5:39–40
  - b. James 2:19
  - c. 1 John 2:3–6
6. What are some specific examples of anthropomorphic language in Scripture? Is it accurate to say that the entire Bible itself is written in anthropomorphic language to one degree or another?

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. If all human language about God is anthropomorphic, is the word “God” itself anthropomorphic? What does it mean to say that the word “God” is language in human form about God?
2. Were the images you had of the Father similar to those discussed in the lecture? Would the same general observations apply?
3. Why do we have such a difficult time imagining God the Father? Do we have the same difficulty forming a mental image of the Son?
4. Do you believe it is possible to speak or think about God without forming some type of mental image? If we do so, are we violating the second commandment?

#### **APPLICATION**

1. What does your mental image of God communicate to you about your understanding of God?
2. What does your mental image of God communicate to you about yourself? Why do you think this way about God?
3. How can you more fully conform your concept of God to the truth of God Himself?

#### **SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Bavinck, Herman. *The Doctrine of God*  
Bray, Gerald. *The Doctrine of God*

NOTES

## 2

# Perfectly Perfect

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The most fundamental term in any Christian’s vocabulary is “God.” But who or what is God? How do we as believers define God? In this lesson, Dr. Sproul discusses some of the difficulties surrounding human attempts to define the one who is absolutely perfect.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to explain some of the inherent difficulties involved in any human attempt to define God.
2. To understand what we mean when we say “human being” as opposed to “supreme being.”
3. To introduce the idea of God as the most perfect being.

### QUOTATIONS

*We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.*

— Nicene Creed

**Q:** *What do you believe when you say, “I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth”?*

**A:** *That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ his Son. I trust him so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and he will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world. He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.*

— Heidelberg Catechism; Question 26

**LECTURE OUTLINE**

- A. What or who is God?
  - 1. How do we go about coming up with a definition of “God”?
  - 2. That is what we are doing when we look at the attributes of God.
  
- B. How do we define anything?
  - 1. All of science is engaged simply in the task of taxonomy — the science of classification or definition.
  - 2. Taxonomy started in the Garden of Eden when God gave Adam the task of naming the animals.
  - 3. Man is still doing taxonomy today.
  - 4. Definition is accomplished by looking for similarities and differences.
  - 5. What we are attempting to do is to individuate.
  - 6. When we talk about God, we are talking about something or someone that is ultimately *sui generis* — that which is in a class by itself.
  - 7. God is supremely *sui generis*, making definition difficult.
  
- C. What does it mean to say that God is a being?
  - 1. Is there something out there called “beingness” in which God participates and in which we participate?
  - 2. We describe ourselves as human beings while God is popularly described as the supreme being.
  - 3. The danger is to think of some general category we call “being.”
  - 4. The problem is that there is no being at all apart from God.
    - a. The Bible says that we live and move and have our being in God (Acts 17:28).
    - b. But we are not “little gods.”
    - c. Pantheism — Everything is some form, extension, mode, piece, or part of God Himself.

- d. Scripture demands that we make a clear distinction between the Creator and the creature.
  5. We do not want to make God one member of a big class of being in the world.
  6. When we think of “being” simply as a mental concept, then it makes perfect sense and we are on safe ground.
  7. When we say that God has beingness and we have beingness in this sense, all we are saying is that God is real and we are real.
- D. The real difference between man and God isn’t the difference between human and supreme kinds of being.
1. The real difference exists in the concept of being itself.
  2. God is being in its absolute perfection.
  3. The medieval theologians’ definition of “God” was *ens perfectissimum* — “the most perfect being.”
  4. Anselm described God as the most perfect conceivable being.
  5. We are imperfect creatures who must speak of the perfect.

**STUDY QUESTIONS (MULTIPLE CHOICE)**

1. What do we call the science of classification or definition?
  - a. Theology
  - b. Diagnostics
  - c. Taxonomy
  - d. Epistemology
2. When did the science of classification and definition begin?
  - a. The Enlightenment
  - b. The Middle Ages
  - c. The Renaissance
  - d. In the Garden of Eden

3. Definition is accomplished by looking for \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Similarities and differences
  - b. Synonyms
  - c. Characteristics
  - d. Things in a class by themselves
4. What is the Latin term for that which is in a class by itself?
  - a. *ens perfectissimum*
  - b. *potentia absoluta*
  - c. *sui generis*
  - d. *iustitia Dei*
5. What is the doctrine that says that everything is some form, extension, mode, piece, or part of God Himself?
  - a. Panentheism
  - b. Pantheism
  - c. Process theology
  - d. Pantelism
6. When we say that God has beingness and we have beingness in the common sense of a mental concept, all we are saying is that God and we are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Real
  - b. In the same class of being
  - c. Beings
  - d. Similar
7. What medieval theological term means “the most perfect being”?
  - a. *persona Deitatis*
  - b. *circumscriptivus*

c. *sui generis*

d. *ens perfectissimum*

8. What medieval theologian is famous for describing God as the most perfect conceivable being in his ontological argument for God's existence?
  - a. Thomas Aquinas
  - b. Peter Abelard
  - c. Anselm
  - d. Francis of Assisi

#### BIBLE STUDY

1. Read the following passages of Scripture, and explain what each has to say about the difficulty of defining God.
  - a. Psalm 145:3
  - b. Isaiah 55:9
  - c. Matthew 11:27
  - d. 1 Corinthians 1:21
2. According to Dr. Sproul, what is the significance of Genesis 2:19–20 in relation to man's ability to define and classify?
3. How do the following passages demonstrate that God is in a class by Himself — *sui generis*?
  - a. Psalm 139:6
  - b. Romans 11:33
4. Scripture uses descriptions of God taken from creation, from human experience, and from human anatomy. Below are examples of each type of description. What is the overall significance of this scriptural phenomenon?
  - a. Descriptions from Creation — Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 27:1; 84:11; Isaiah 31:4; 53:7; Heb. 12:29
  - b. Descriptions from Human Experience — Exodus 15:26; Psalm 23:1; Isaiah 33:22; 54:5; 61:10; Hebrews 11:10

- c. Descriptions from Human Anatomy — Exodus 33:20; Numbers 11:23; Deuteronomy 8:3; Psalm 11:4; 55:1
- 5. In Acts 17:28, Paul preaches the following words: “in Him we live and move and have our being.” What are some passages of Scripture demonstrating that this text cannot be interpreted in a pantheistic sense?
- 6. How do the following texts indicate the distinction between the Creator and the creature?
  - a. Genesis 1
  - b. Psalm 50:10–12
  - c. Psalm 90:2
  - d. Isaiah 43:7
  - e. Acts 17:24–25
  - f. Revelation 4:11

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1. Why does the fact that God is in a class by Himself make definition of “God” so difficult?
- 2. What danger is involved with saying that there is no being apart from God’s being? Why is this a danger?
- 3. Is it possible for fallen human beings to conceive of absolute perfection? Explain.
- 4. What is helpful about the medieval definition of God as “the most perfect being”? What is not helpful about this definition?

#### **APPLICATION**

- 1. What does the word “perfect” conjure up in your imagination? Is your concept of “perfect” perfect?
- 2. How does a knowledge of God’s absolute perfection give you hope?
- 3. What would it mean in your life to be perfect as our Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48)?

**SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Bavinck, Herman. *The Doctrine of God*

## NOTES

# 3

## Alike, But Very Different

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

One of the first doctrines we encounter when we begin to read Scripture is that man is created in the image of God. While this doctrine in the first chapters of Genesis tells us a lot about man, it also tells us something about God. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul explores how our likeness with God makes intelligible language about God possible.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the concept of the image of God.
2. To be able to define the three different forms of language.
3. To be able to explain the use of analogy in relation to our language about God.

### QUOTATIONS

*Our greatest claim to nobility is our created capacity to know God, to be in personal relationship with him, to love him and to worship him.*

— John R.W. Stott

*No bodily eye hath ever, or can possibly see Him. Neither can the eye of understanding perfectly reach Him.*

— Thomas Hodges

### LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. We are created in the image of God — *imago Dei*.
  1. This says something about us, but it also says something about God.
  2. If there is some sense in which there is a likeness between human beings

and the divine being, then that becomes important in our attempt to learn something about God.

- B. All language we use to describe God is human or anthropomorphic language.
1. In the Old Testament we see rich, earthy language used to describe God.
  2. In contrast, we tend to use abstract categories and refer to God as “self-sufficient,” for example.
  3. People get confused when they think that the first is an example of figurative language but that the second is not.
  4. Both are human terms, and both are meaningful.
- C. Thomas Aquinas was concerned about the language we use to describe God.
1. Aquinas identified three basic ways in which we tend to use language when describing things that we see in our world.
    - a. Univocal Language — When a word is used to describe two different things and its meaning stays exactly the same.
    - b. Equivocal Language — When a word is applied to different things and it radically changes its meaning.
    - c. Analogical Language — When a word is used to describe two different things and the meaning of the word changes in proportion to the differences in the beings being described.
  2. Illustration: When I say “I have a good dog,” it doesn’t mean the same as when I say “Clay is a good man.”
  3. When we say that God is good, we’re still using a human term.
  4. There is a likeness between human goodness and divine goodness, but not an absolute identity.
  5. God’s goodness infinitely exceeds the highest goodness we can conceive of among men.
  6. God’s being is disproportionate to ours.
  7. The point is that every analogy that we use falls apart if we press it too far.
  8. Augustine said that anything we affirm about God analogically, we must deny univocally.

9. According to Aquinas, all of our language about God is limited, but it is not meaningless. It is not equivocal. There is a real basis for communicating trustworthy and adequate information.
10. God condescends to speak on our level, or as Calvin said, “He lisps.”
11. We have to understand the limits of our speech about God, but we also have to guard against skepticism because Christianity is a revealed religion.

**STUDY QUESTIONS (MULTIPLE CHOICE)**

1. What does the Latin phrase *imago Dei* mean?
  - a. Image of God
  - b. Imagining God
  - c. Attributes of God
  - d. Existence of God
2. What theologian does Dr. Sproul mention who analyzed the different types of language that men use to speak about things?
  - a. John Calvin
  - b. Augustine
  - c. Thomas Aquinas
  - d. Anselm
3. When a word is used to describe two different things and its meaning stays exactly the same, the type of language is called \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Analogical language
  - b. Univocal language
  - c. Anthropomorphic language
  - d. Equivocal language
4. When a word is applied to different things and it radically changes its meaning, the type of language is called \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Univocal language

- b. Anthropomorphic language
  - c. Analogical language
  - d. Equivocal language
5. When a word is used to describe two different things and the meaning of the word changes in proportion to the differences in the thing being described, the type of language is called \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Equivocal language
  - b. Univocal language
  - c. Analogical language
  - d. Anthropomorphic language
6. If we say that a man is good and we say that God is good, what type of language are we using?
- a. Analogical language
  - b. Equivocal language
  - c. Univocal language
  - d. Anthropomorphic language
7. Who said that anything we affirm about God analogically, we must deny univocally?
- a. Jonathan Edwards
  - b. Thomas Aquinas
  - c. John Calvin
  - d. Augustine
8. Who illustrated God's condescension to speak on our level by saying that "God lisps"?
- a. Thomas Aquinas
  - b. John Calvin

c. Augustine

d. Martin Luther

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

1. Read Genesis 1:26–28. What does the text itself indicate is involved with being created in the image and likeness of God?
2. What does Genesis 1:26–28 tell us about man? What does it tell us about God?
3. Read Colossians 1:15. Christ is said to be the image of the invisible God. What is the difference between Christ as the “image of God” and Adam as the “image of God”? What are the similarities?
4. Read Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. How do these passages of Scripture relate to the doctrine of the “image of God”?
5. What are some biblical analogies of God that could be dangerous if pressed too far?
6. Provide at least one biblical example illustrating Augustine’s statement that anything we affirm about God analogically, we must deny univocally.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why is the doctrine of the image of God so important in our attempts to learn about God?
2. Why is it important to remember that even our common abstract language about God is anthropomorphic?
3. Discuss Thomas Aquinas’ categorization of language. Is the classification helpful? Is it accurate? Explain.
4. Augustine said that anything we affirm about God analogically, we must deny univocally. Do you agree or disagree? Defend your answer.

#### **APPLICATION**

1. Have you ever considered what it means for you to be created in the image of God?

2. How does the discussion of the different types of human language help you as you seek to know God more intimately?
3. What is your reaction to the knowledge that God condescends to our level to communicate to us?

**SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Hoekema, Anthony. *Created in God's Image*

NOTES

# 4

## The Great I AM

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Who is this God that we worship? The Bible reveals many descriptions of God, but does He have a name? In this lesson, Dr. Sproul discusses the personal name of God and what it means for Christians to know this One who says of Himself, “I AM.”

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the significance of biblical names.
2. To be able to define the meaning of the name *Yahweh*.
3. To be able to summarize the concept of aseity.

### QUOTATIONS

*God’s name, as it is set out in the Word, is both a glorious name, full of majesty; and also a gracious name, full of mercy.*

— William Gouge

*God’s name is God himself in his revealed holiness.*

— F.J. Delitzsch

### LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. Introduction — John and Mary
- B. Our God has a name.
  1. He is personal.
  2. There is a history of a relationship between God and His people documented in the Old and New Testaments.

3. We do not pray to a force; we pray to a personal being.

C. Exodus 3:1–15

1. In verse 11, Moses asks God, “Who am I?”
2. In verse 13, Moses asks God, “Who are you?”
3. God answers, “I AM.”
  - a. The Hebrew word is *Yahweh*.
  - b. This name is called the tetragrammaton.
4. *Yahweh* means “I AM who I AM.”
5. The verbal form of *Yahweh* is “to be.”
6. While our being is always transient and becoming, God is perfect being.
7. God does not change; His being is eternal. He does not say, “I was, I am, and I will be.” He says, “I am.”

D. The attribute of God expressed here is His aseity.

1. Aseity refers to God’s eternal being.
2. God is not a creature and therefore has no beginning in time.
3. His being is not dependent upon anything, but our being is dependent upon His.

**STUDY QUESTIONS (MULTIPLE CHOICE)**

1. That God has a name is important because it indicates that God is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. A force
  - b. Personal
  - c. Mutable
  - d. Loving
2. In Exodus 3:11, what question does Moses ask God after hearing what God wants him to do?

- a. Who am I?
  - b. Who are you?
  - c. Where is Egypt?
  - d. Why me?
3. In Exodus 3:13, what question does Moses ask God after receiving an answer to his first question?
- a. Who am I?
  - b. Who are you?
  - c. What if they do not believe me?
  - d. Why me?
4. When Moses asks God what His name is, what is God's answer?
- a. Elohim
  - b. I am the Alpha and the Omega
  - c. I AM Who I AM
  - d. Jesus
5. What is the Hebrew word that God uses when giving His name to Moses at the burning bush?
- a. Elohim
  - b. Yahweh
  - c. Adonai
  - d. El Shaddai
6. What is the Greek technical term that is often used to describe the name that God reveals to Moses at the burning bush?
- a. Theos
  - b. Tetrarchy
  - c. Tetrapolitan

- d. Tetragrammaton
- 7. What verbal form is expressed in the Hebrew word *Yahweh*?
  - a. To be
  - b. To become
  - c. To love
  - d. To covenant
- 8. What attribute of God is most clearly expressed in the Hebrew name *Yahweh*?
  - a. Omniscience
  - b. Holiness
  - c. Aseity
  - d. Omnipotence

**BIBLE STUDY**

- 1. In light of the following Scriptures, what is the significance of the “name” of God?
  - a. Psalm 8:1
  - b. Psalm 113:1–3
  - c. Psalm 145:1–2
  - d. Psalm 148:5, 13
- 2. Read Exodus 3. What exactly does Moses see and hear while tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro?
- 3. What is the significance of God’s statements to Moses in verses 5 and 6? How is this tied to the previous events in Old Testament redemptive history?
- 4. What does God tell Moses He will do in verses 7–10? How will Moses be involved?

5. What is Moses' reaction to God's words? What is God's response? Is this what you would expect?
6. How is the name of God as revealed in verses 14–22 related to God's previous covenantal relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? What is the significance of this in the narrative?

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. The third commandment tells us not to take the name of the LORD our God in vain. How do the truths explored in this lesson shed light on this commandment?
2. Why is it important to always remember that our God is a covenant-keeping God?
3. Moses is one of the great saints of the Old Testament. Does his response to God in Exodus 3 and 4 come as a surprise to you? Do we tend to forget sometimes that Moses and the other biblical saints were real men who faced real struggles? How can an appreciation of this strengthen our faith?

#### **APPLICATION**

1. Have you ever asked yourself why there is something rather than nothing?
2. Have you ever asked yourself what it would take for there to be something?
3. Meditate upon Exodus 3, and especially upon God's self-revelation of His name. Reflect upon what this name means and how it affects your relationship with the personal God in whom we live and move and have our being.

#### **SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Packer, J.I. *Knowing God*

## NOTES

# 5

## God Is Spirit

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The study of the attributes of God can sometimes be overwhelming because of the abstract and technical nature of much of the discussion. Yet there are few other subjects of study that can be so rewarding. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul discusses what it means to confess that God is Spirit.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand what we mean and do not mean when we refer to God as “Spirit.”
2. To be able to explain the difference between our spirits and God’s Spirit.
3. To understand how to worship God in spirit and truth.

### QUOTATIONS

*Q: What is God?*

*A: God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, every where present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.*

— The Westminster Larger Catechism; Q. 7

*We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God – eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty; completely wise, just, and good, and the overflowing source of all good.*

— The Belgic Confession; Art. 1

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### A. Introduction

1. In the mid-twentieth century, J.B. Phillips wrote a book entitled *Your God Is Too Small*.
2. The book touched a nerve and surprised the publishing industry.
3. When we talk about the attributes of God, they are often so abstract that we tend to be frightened by the discussion.
4. Rarely do we hear sermons on these subjects.
5. But the topic is a favorite of seminary students.

### B. God is a Spirit.

1. This does not mean that God is a ghost or angelic being.
2. It means that God is not a material being.
3. We live inside our bodies because we are physical creatures.
4. Heidegger argued that our existence is defined by our locality.
5. God cannot be localized.
6. As John 4 teaches, God is a Spirit and cannot be restricted to one place.

### C. Rene Descartes struggled with the nature of Spirit.

1. He defined “extension” as that which takes up a definite amount of space.
2. Anything that is physical has extension.
3. Anything that is not physical has no extension.

### D. When God gave man life, man became a living spirit, so God is not the only spiritual being in existence.

1. The difference is that our spirits are contained in our bodies, while God is an infinite Spirit.
2. Even though the human spirit is not extended, it is finite.

**STUDY QUESTIONS (MULTIPLE CHOICE)**

1. When we say that God is Spirit, we do not mean that God is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. A ghost
  - b. A non-physical being
  - c. Personal
  - d. Good
  
2. When we say that God is Spirit, we mean that God is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. An angelic type of being
  - b. Not a physical being
  - c. A physical being
  - d. A force
  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ argued that our existence is defined by our locality.
  - a. Descartes
  - b. Heidegger
  - c. J.B. Phillips
  - d. J.I. Packer
  
4. In what chapter of Scripture does Jesus say that God is Spirit and that He must be worshiped in spirit and truth?
  - a. Matthew 4
  - b. Luke 4
  - c. Mark 4
  - d. John 4
  
5. \_\_\_\_\_ defined “extension” as that which takes up a definite amount of space.
  - a. Wittgenstein

- b. Aquinas
  - c. Heidegger
  - d. Descartes
6. Anything that is not physical has no \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Reality
  - b. Existence
  - c. Power
  - d. Extension
7. The difference between man and God is that our spirits are contained in our bodies, while God is \_\_\_\_\_ Spirit.
- a. An extended
  - b. An infinite
  - c. An impersonal
  - d. A finite
8. Even though the human spirit is not extended, it is \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Impersonal
  - b. Finite
  - c. Infinite
  - d. Material

**BIBLE STUDY**

1. How is God's attribute of spirituality related to the second commandment (cf. Exo. 20:4)?
2. Read John 4. In context Jesus is speaking to the woman about the location where people should worship God. Why does Jesus introduce God's spirituality at this point in the conversation?

3. How is our spirit similar to the Spirit of God (cf. John 4:24; 1 Cor. 14:14; Phil. 3:3)?
4. What does 1 Corinthians 6:17 teach us about our relation to the Spirit of God?
5. How does the Holy Spirit relate to our spirit, according to Romans 8:16?

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Is the divine attribute of spirituality negated by the historical fact of the incarnation?
2. If God is Spirit, what is distinctive about the Holy Spirit?
3. What does it mean to worship God in spirit and truth?
4. Why do New Covenant believers continue to localize God when they think of worship? How can this be corrected?

#### **APPLICATION**

1. Since we are forbidden to create images of God, how do we think of God when we pray to Him?
2. Is it difficult for you to conceive of a purely spiritual being? Does such a being seem less real than a material being? Is your answer influenced by modern philosophical theories of reality?
3. How can we learn to worship God in spirit and truth rather than seeking to localize God?

#### **SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Charnock, Stephen. *The Existence and Attributes of God*

NOTES

# 6

## Our Infinite God

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Infinity is one of the most difficult concepts for human beings to contemplate. By definition it is a concept that goes beyond our finite grasp. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul introduces the concept of God's attribute of infinity.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the concept of infinity.
2. To understand and be able to explain the difficulty of grasping this concept.
3. To be able to define the meaning of this attribute as applied to God.

### QUOTATIONS

*God is an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.*  
— Augustine

*Though heaven be God's palace, yet it is not his prison.*  
— Thomas Brooks

### LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. Infinity ushers us into a category of thought that is filled with mystery.
- B. When we describe God, one of the most common ways to speak is by way of negation.
  1. To describe something by way of negation is to say what it is not.
  2. Immutability means that something does not change.
  3. Infinity means that something is not finite.

- C. Three of the most difficult concepts we talk about in our common speech are time, space, and infinity.
1. What is time, and how is it measured?
    - a. Kant referred to time as a pure intuition. It is an idea, a concept.
    - b. We measure time by the relative motion of something between two or more things.
    - c. Time is measured against material objects and motion.
    - d. Take away motion and what happens to time?
    - e. What would time be like to God before there was space and motion?
  2. What is space?
    - a. The common conception of space is that it is nothing.
    - b. But what is nothing?
    - c. Nothing is the absence of something.
- D. God is infinite.
1. This means that God is unlimited.
  2. There is no end to His being, and there is no end to His perfections.
  3. There is no place where nothing exists because God fills all of reality.
  4. There is nowhere we can go where God does not exist.
  5. When we say that God's being fills everything, we have to be careful not to say that God *is* everything — that is pantheism.
  6. Everything that exists subsists within the being of God.

**STUDY QUESTIONS (MULTIPLE CHOICE)**

1. When we describe something by saying what it is not, this method of speaking is called the way of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Definition
  - b. Obfuscation

- c. Mystery
  - d. Negation
2. \_\_\_\_\_ means that something doesn't change.
- a. Immutability
  - b. Omniscience
  - c. Infinity
  - d. Eternity
3. \_\_\_\_\_ means that something is not finite.
- a. Immutability
  - b. Infinity
  - c. Intuition
  - d. Immensity
4. Three of the most difficult concepts in our common speech are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Trinity, incarnation, spirit
  - b. Time, space, infinity
  - c. Love, life, beauty
  - d. Concept, idea, mind
5. Who referred to time as a pure intuition?
- a. Kierkegaard
  - b. Sartre
  - c. Kant
  - d. Nietzsche

6. We measure time by the \_\_\_\_\_ of something between two or more things.
  - a. Absence
  - b. Relative motion
  - c. Speed
  - d. Angle
7. The common conception of space is that it is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Something
  - b. God
  - c. A force
  - d. Nothing
8. \_\_\_\_\_ teaches that God is everything and everything is God.
  - a. Pantheism
  - b. Panentheism
  - c. Theism
  - d. Atheism

**BIBLE STUDY**

1. Study Psalm 90:2. How does this verse describe God?
2. How does Revelation 1:8 illustrate the infinity of God?
3. When God reveals His covenant name to Moses in Exodus 3:14, does anything about His name illuminate His attribute of infinity?
4. What do the following verses indicate about God and His infinity?
  - a. Genesis 1:1
  - b. John 1:3

5. Read the following Scriptures and note the way in which they refer to the relationship between God and time.
  - a. 2 Peter 3:8
  
  - b. Isaiah 46:9–10
  
6. Read the following Scriptures and note the way in which they refer to the relationship between God and time. How do these truths relate to those discovered in question 5?
  - a. Galatians 4:4–5
  
  - b. Acts 17:30–31

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Is it possible to define infinity in positive language, or is it possible to speak of infinity only by way of negation?
  
2. Discuss Augustine's comment: "*God is an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.*" Is this a helpful description of infinity?
  
3. What would be the ramifications of denying God's infinity?

#### **APPLICATION**

1. Meditate upon those passages of Scripture that speak of God's infinity. How do these Scriptures magnify your concept of God?
  
2. Do you find it difficult to conceive of an infinite God as a personal God? Did the authors of Scripture have this difficulty?
  
3. How does an understanding of the doctrine of God's infinity affect your prayer life?

#### **SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Helm, Paul. *Eternal God*

NOTES

## 7

# The God Who Is Everywhere

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Scripture tells us that God fills the heaven and earth, that there is nowhere one can flee from His presence. Traditionally the church has used the word “omnipresence” to describe this attribute of God. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul introduces the concept of God’s omnipresence, explaining what it does and does not mean.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to define the concept of omnipresence.
2. To understand what omnipresence does not mean as well as what it does mean.
3. To contemplate the blessing of this doctrine for all of God’s people.

### QUOTATIONS

*This is the fundamental thing, the most serious thing of all, that we are always in the presence of God.*

— D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

*Within thy circling power I stand;  
On every side I find thy hand;  
Awake, asleep, at home, abroad,  
I am surrounded still with God.*

— Isaac Watts

### LECTURE OUTLINE

#### A. Introduction

1. The biblical words translated “spirit” can mean several things — “spirit,” “breath,” “wind.”

2. Gas is a part of material reality.
  3. God is not an infinite “gas” diffused throughout the universe.
  4. God’s being is a completely different kind of being that transcends the properties of matter.
  5. His being exists in a different dimension from our own.
  6. Jeremiah 23:21–23 indicates that God is everywhere.
- B. God is omnipresent.
1. “Omni” means “all.”
  2. Another word for God’s omnipresence is “ubiquity.”
  3. “Ubiquity” means “equal whereness” and escalates the idea of God’s presence.
  4. Not only does this mean that there is nowhere that God is not, but the equity has to do with God in the fullness of His presence.
  5. Not only is God everywhere, but He is everywhere in the fullness of His being.
  6. The immensity of God does not refer to the size of God.
  7. The immensity of God means not only that God is everywhere at all times but that all He is is everywhere at the same time.

**STUDY QUESTIONS (MULTIPLE CHOICE)**

1. The biblical words translated “spirit” can also be translated how?
  - a. God
  - b. Space
  - c. Breath
  - d. Gas

2. God's being exists in a different \_\_\_\_\_ from our being.
  - a. Universe
  - b. Dimension
  - c. State of limitation
  - d. All of the above
3. What does "omni" mean?
  - a. All
  - b. Presence
  - c. Equal
  - d. Where
4. A synonym for omnipresence is \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - a. Omniscience
  - b. Ubiquity
  - c. Eternity
  - d. Diffusion
5. "Ubiquity" means \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - a. Part of God is present everywhere
  - b. Size
  - c. Limitation
  - d. Equal whereness
6. Ubiquity has to do with God in the \_\_\_\_\_ of His presence.
  - a. Fullness
  - b. Partiality
  - c. Incomprehensibility
  - d. Awesomeness

7. The immensity of God does not refer to the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
  - a. Size
  - b. Fullness of the presence
  - c. Ubiquity
  - d. None of the above
8. The \_\_\_\_\_ of God means not only that God is everywhere at all times but that all He is everywhere at the same time.
  - a. Infinity
  - b. Eternity
  - c. Immensity
  - d. Incomprehensibility

**BIBLE STUDY**

1. The doctrine of omnipresence asserts that God cannot be limited by space. How does Genesis 1:1 support this teaching?
2. Read the poetic description of God's omnipresence in Psalm 139:7–10. How does David derive hope and peace from God's omnipresence?
3. What do the following passages contribute to the doctrine of divine omnipresence?
  - a. 1 Kings 8:27
  - b. Isaiah 66:1–2
  - c. Acts 7:48
4. How does Colossians 1:17 relate to the doctrine of omnipresence?
5. Read Amos 9:1–4. What does this passage teach about God's presence for judgment?
6. In light of what we have discussed concerning omnipresence, explain Colossians 2:9.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Is God present in hell?
2. What kinds of analogies can be used to illustrate the omnipresence of God? Where do these analogies ultimately break down?
3. What does it mean for God to exist in a different dimension from ours? Can this fact be illustrated by means of analogy?
4. Does the doctrine of the incarnation contradict the doctrine of omnipresence? Explain.

**APPLICATION**

1. How should the doctrine of God's omnipresence affect you when you are tempted to sin?
2. Why should the doctrine of divine omnipresence encourage you? Re-read Psalm 139:7–10.
3. Reflect on the Scriptures that teach God's omnipresence; praise the God who is always with you for who He is.

**SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Charnock, Stephen. *The Existence and Attributes of God*

## NOTES

## 8

# The God Who Doesn't Change

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

One of the oldest philosophical questions involves the nature of a changing reality. Is reality essentially being, or is it essentially becoming? In this lecture, Dr. Sproul discusses the divine attribute of immutability. He explains what God's changelessness means in the context of an ever-changing world.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to distinguish between the concepts of being and becoming.
2. To be able to define the concept of divine immutability.
3. To understand the importance of this doctrine for the Christian faith and life.

### QUOTATIONS

*God cannot change for the better, for he is perfect; and being perfect, he cannot change for the worse.*

— A.W. Pink

*The unchangeableness of the divine purposes is a necessary consequence of the unchangeableness of the divine nature.*

— Johann Keil

### LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. Introduction — The pre-Socratic philosophers
  1. Parmenides is famous for the statement, "Whatever is, is."

2. Parmenides claimed that when we speak of being, for it to be, it cannot be going through a process of change.
  3. That which is being cannot be in a state of becoming or it would always be in a state of transition.
  4. Ultimate reality, the source of all existence, must be in a pure state of being.
  5. Some have said that the real father of modern existentialism was Heraclitus.
  6. According to Heraclitus, all that we perceive, we perceive as changing.
  7. The only thing that is permanent in this world is “flux” or change itself.
  8. Heraclitus is famous for saying, “You cannot step into the same river twice.”
  9. Everything we see is undergoing change and mutation.
  10. We experience a sense of discontinuity with the past as well as a sense of continuity.
  11. Change is a fundamental attribute of all creatures.
- B. One of the most important attributes of God is His immutability.
1. Immutability means that God never undergoes any mutation; He is unchanging.
  2. God is eternally the same in His being.
  3. In a world of change we experience constant instability, but one thing that remains constant is the being and character of God.
  4. Immutability does not mean that God is inert or frozen.
  5. God is active, but in His activity there is no change in His attributes or character.
- C. Why does natural man feel at enmity with God?
1. God’s holiness is threatening because we are not holy.
  2. God’s power makes us jealous and angry.
  3. His omniscience means He knows everything about us.

4. But His immutability means that He will never negotiate His holiness, that He will never grow weak, and that He will never suffer a memory lapse.
5. All that God is, He will always be.

**STUDY QUESTIONS (MULTIPLE CHOICE)**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is famous for the statement, “Whatever is, is.”
  - a. Socrates
  - b. Parmenides
  - c. Heraclitus
  - d. Aristotle
2. Some have said that the real father of modern existentialism was \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Heraclitus
  - b. Plato
  - c. Parmenides
  - d. Socrates
3. Heraclitus asserted that the only thing that is permanent in this world is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Flux
  - b. Immutability
  - c. Nothing
  - d. Permanence
4. Who is famous for saying, “You cannot step into the same river twice”?
  - a. Socrates
  - b. Aristotle
  - c. Parmenides
  - d. Heraclitus

5. \_\_\_\_\_ is a fundamental attribute of all creatures.
  - a. Immutability
  - b. Sin
  - c. Change
  - d. Perfection
  
6. \_\_\_\_\_ means that God is unchanging.
  - a. Omnipresence
  - b. Immutability
  - c. Immensity
  - d. Ubiquity
  
7. Immutability does not mean that God is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Inert
  - b. Unchanging
  - c. Incapable of Mutation
  - d. None of the Above
  
8. Why is God's holiness threatening to fallen man?
  - a. Because it means that He knows everything about us
  - b. Because God negotiates His holiness
  - c. Because fallen man is not holy
  - d. All of the above

**BIBLE STUDY**

1. How is the inherent changeableness of creation contrasted with God in Psalm 102:25–27?

2. Read the following passages of Scripture and comment briefly on their contribution to the doctrine of divine immutability.
  - a. Malachi 3:6
  - b. James 1:17
  - c. Psalm 33:11
  - d. Isaiah 46:9–11
  - e. Numbers 23:19
3. How do those passages that speak of God “changing His mind” relate to the general truth of God’s immutability? Read the following passages: Exodus 32:9–14; Isaiah 38:1–6; Jonah 3:4, 10; Jeremiah 18:7–10.
4. What is the significance of the fact that Psalm 102:25–27 is quoted in Hebrews 1:10–12?
5. What is the meaning of Hebrews 13:8?
6. Does Galatians 4:4 contradict the doctrine of divine immutability? Explain possible answers to this question.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says that God is without “passions” (2:1). How does this relate to immutability? How would you assess this confessional statement?
2. A doctrinal movement known as process theology asserts that change is an essential aspect of all existence, including God’s existence. How would you respond to this assertion?
3. What is the significance of the biblical teaching that God is both infinite and personal?
4. Why is the doctrine of divine immutability crucial to the Christian faith? What would it be like if God could change in His being, character, promises, or purposes?

**APPLICATION**

1. Every human being has experienced the pain of broken promises. Every human being has broken promises to others. What does it mean to you personally that God is immutable?
2. Although immutability is strictly an incommunicable attribute, are there elements of immutability that we as believers can partially imitate? Can we not strive to always keep our word?
3. Meditate on those passages of Scripture that teach God's divine immutability. Praise God for His faithfulness to His promises and purposes.

**SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Charnock, Stephen. *The Existence and Attributes of God*

NOTES

# 9

## God Is Good

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

It would seem that nothing could be less controversial than the fact of God's goodness, yet this fundamental attribute of God is attacked on all sides in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul explains the nature of God's goodness in contrast with those arguments that are raised against it.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To grasp the significant difference between the Christian concept of God and dualistic concepts of God.
2. To understand the nature of God's goodness and the objections that are raised against it.
3. To discover how to trust in the unchanging goodness of God.

### QUOTATIONS

*God's goodness is the root of all goodness; and our goodness, if we have any, springs out of his goodness.*

— William Tyndale

*We cannot always trace God's hand but we can always trust God's heart.*

— C.H. Spurgeon

### LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. The goodness of God is a priority of the Judeo-Christian tradition.
  1. It is in contrast with dualism — the view that there are two equal and opposite forces that coexist from all eternity.

2. According to dualism, one of these forces is good and the other is evil, and these two gods are locked in a perpetual struggle.
  3. In recent decades we have seen the invasion of this kind of thinking into Christianity with the rise of process theology.
  4. Process theology teaches that within God Himself a certain process or oscillation goes on between two poles — a good pole and an evil pole.
- B. According to Scripture, within the being of God there is no shadow of turning.
1. There is no change in God, and there is no darkness or hint of evil.
  2. Some believe there must be evil in God because of the presence of evil and suffering in the world.
  3. On the other hand, some say that because God is good, there can be no hell.
  4. Some believe that God is good only if He gives us everything we want.
  5. The manifestation of God's wrath is always seen in the context of the good character of God.
  6. It is because God is good that He is wrathful and exercises judgment.
- C. God loves goodness and hates evil.
1. It is difficult for us to conceive of a being so good and so holy that, as Habakkuk says, He is too holy even to look at evil.
  2. A good God cannot play fast and loose with our sin.
  3. It is because God is good that He cannot play fast and loose with our sin.
  4. It is because God is good that He judges iniquity.
- D. Several other attributes of God are traditionally subsumed under the attribute of goodness.
1. Benevolence is the kindness that God exhibits to a fallen race.
  2. Love is so much a part of the character of God that Scripture says, "God is love."
  3. Mercy flows from the other attributes. God could be good without being merciful; mercy is an added benefit.

**STUDY QUESTIONS (MULTIPLE CHOICE)**

1. The goodness of God is a priority of the \_\_\_\_\_ tradition.
  - a. Judeo-Christian
  - b. Dualist
  - c. Buddhist
  - d. Process theology
  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ teaches that there are two equal and opposite forces that coexist from all eternity.
  - a. Judaism
  - b. Liberation theology
  - c. Dualism
  - d. Christianity
  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ teaches that within God Himself a certain oscillation goes on between two poles — a good pole and an evil pole.
  - a. Process theology
  - b. Liberalism
  - c. Neo-orthodoxy
  - d. Christianity
  
4. Some say that because God is good, there can be no \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Sin
  - b. Hell
  - c. Suffering
  - d. Evil
  
5. The manifestation of God's \_\_\_\_\_ is always seen in the context of the good character of God.
  - a. Existence

- b. Evil pole of existence
  - c. Wrath
  - d. None of the above
6. It is because God is good that He \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Winks at sin
  - b. Created evil
  - c. Saves everyone
  - d. Judges iniquity
7. \_\_\_\_\_ is the kindness that God exhibits to a fallen race.
- a. Omnipotence
  - b. Holiness
  - c. Benevolence
  - d. All of the above
8. God could be good without being \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Holy
  - b. Merciful
  - c. Just
  - d. Truthful

**BIBLE STUDY**

1. What does Luke 18:19 teach us about the goodness of God?
2. How does God's good character affect what God does? Read the following texts before answering.
  - a. Genesis 1:31
  - b. Psalm 119:68
  - c. Romans 12:2

3. What does Scripture teach concerning the source of goodness in this world?
  - a. James 1:17
  - b. Psalm 84:11
  - c. Matthew 7:11
  - d. Romans 8:28
4. What does Galatians 6:10 teach us about the relationship between our good actions and God's good character?
5. Read the following Scriptures that speak of God's attribute of love. What does each passage teach?
  - a. 1 John 4:8
  - b. John 17:24
  - c. John 3:35
  - d. John 14:31
  - e. 1 John 4:10
  - f. Romans 5:8
  - g. Galatians 2:20
  - h. Zephaniah 3:17–18
  - i. John 17:26
6. When the Scripture speaks of God's mercy, to what does it refer? Examine the following passages as you study this issue.
  - a. Exodus 34:6
  - b. Psalm 103:8
  - c. 2 Samuel 24:14
  - d. 2 Corinthians 1:3
  - e. Hebrews 4:16

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Does the existence of sin and evil in the world rule out the possibility of a good God?
2. How would you answer those who argue that because God is good there can be no hell?
3. Why is it so difficult for us to conceive of a God so good and holy that He cannot even look upon sin?
4. Dr. Sproul said that in the abstract sense, God could be good without being merciful. Discuss this comment.

**APPLICATION**

1. Have you ever found yourself doubting God's goodness? Why did you have these doubts? How has this lesson helped to overcome any remaining doubts?
2. How can you imitate God's goodness in your own life? What practical steps can you take to move in that direction?
3. Read the First Epistle of John. Meditate on the ways in which John says God's love is to be manifested in and through believers. Pray that this fruit of the Spirit would be increased in your life and in the lives of all other Christians.

**SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Charnock, Stephen. *The Existence and Attributes of God*

NOTES

# 10

## God Is Truth

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Jesus declared to His followers, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” God is the author of truth and is truth. What does it mean to say that God is truth? In this lesson, Dr. Sproul discusses the truthfulness of God, contrasting it with the deceptive nature of man.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the concept of truth.
2. To understand the difference between God’s nature as a covenant-keeper and ours as covenant-breakers.
3. To emphasize the importance of the sacredness of truth.

### QUOTATIONS

*Nothing is deemed more precious by God than truth.*

— John Calvin

*A man were better to say there is no God than say that God is unfaithful.*

— Thomas Brooks

### LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. Truth is sacred and holy because God is truth.
  1. The author of all truth is God.
  2. When we talk about the attributes of God we must include the statement, “God is truth.”
  3. Jesus said, “I am the truth.”

4. At His trial before Pilate, Jesus said that He came to bear witness to the truth and that all who are of the truth would hear His voice.
  5. Pilate's response, "What is truth?," is ironic because truth incarnate was standing right in front of him.
  6. Jesus also says that Scripture is truth. He says, "Thy word is truth."
  7. There is no falsehood in the character of God.
- B. The issue of truth is one of the great points of dissimilarity between God and man.
1. All men are liars, but God cannot lie.
  2. Part of our problem in the Christian life is that we project our own shortcomings upon the character of God.
  3. We create God in our own image and assume that because we lie and break promises, God can lie and break promises.
  4. In biblical categories truth involves more than the absence of falsehood; it also includes doing and saying that which is trustworthy.
  5. We are all covenant-breakers, but God is a covenant-keeper.
  6. God not only tells the truth; He does the truth, and He lives the truth.
  7. When God makes a promise, He keeps it.
- C. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent's first tactic was to come to Eve and say, "Hath God said?"
1. Satan tries to undermine our confidence in the trustworthiness of God.
  2. Our unbelief is a lack of confidence in the truth of God.
  3. It is one thing to believe in God; it is quite another to believe God.
- D. The Greek word for truth is *aletheia*.
1. It means without deception or falsehood, the communication of a true state of affairs.
  2. This is called the correspondence theory of truth.
  3. According to this theory, truth is that which corresponds to reality; truth is what is.

4. In our day, we have seen the relativization of truth due to the claim that our perceptions of reality are all relative.
5. The ultimate Christian view is that truth corresponds to reality as it is perceived by God.
6. God knows reality exhaustively because of His omniscience.
7. The Aramaic word for truth is “Amen.”

**STUDY QUESTIONS (MULTIPLE CHOICE)**

1. Truth is sacred and holy because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Truth is true.
  - b. Truth is relative.
  - c. God is truth.
  - d. Truth is subjective
2. Why was Pilate’s response to Jesus ironic?
  - a. Because the Gospel is true.
  - b. Because truth incarnate was standing right in front of him.
  - c. Because there is no such thing as truth.
  - d. None of the above
3. The issue of truth is one of the great points of \_\_\_\_\_ between God and man.
  - a. Similarity
  - b. Dissimilarity
  - c. Contact
  - d. Agreement
4. The Greek word for truth is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. *aletheia*
  - b. *amen*

c. *veritas*

d. *iustitia*

5. What theory of truth was advocated by John Locke?
  - a. The Pragmatic Theory
  - b. The Coherence Theory
  - c. The Correspondence Theory
  - d. The Existential Theory
6. The ultimate Christian view is that truth corresponds to reality as it is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Perceived by man
  - b. Perceived by God
  - c. Experienced by man
  - d. Believed to be.
7. God knows reality exhaustively because of His \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Holiness
  - b. Omnipotence
  - c. Faithfulness
  - d. Omniscience
8. The \_\_\_\_\_ word for truth is “Amen.”
  - a. Aramaic
  - b. English
  - c. Greek
  - d. Latin

**BIBLE STUDY**

1. Several elements are involved in the assertion that God is truth. What do we learn from the following passages of Scripture?
  - a. Jeremiah 10:10–11
  - b. John 17:3
2. God's truthfulness also means that God is faithful. Examine the following Scriptures and explain how each sheds light on this important fact.
  - a. Deuteronomy 32:4
  - b. Numbers 23:19
3. What do the following Scriptures tell us about the relationship between God's words and reality?
  - a. Hebrews 6:18
  - b. Psalm 12:6
  - c. Proverbs 30:5
4. Study John 17:17 and explain what it teaches concerning the relationship between God's Word and truth. Is there a higher standard to which Scripture must submit?
5. Examine the following verses and note what each says concerning our call to imitate God's truthfulness and faithfulness.
  - a. Colossians 3:9–10
  - b. Ephesians 4:25
  - c. Exodus 20:16

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why do you suppose Satan's first line of attack is to cast doubt on the trustworthiness of the Word of God?
2. What does it mean to assert that God's Word is not merely true, but also is truth itself?
3. How would you respond to those who claim that truth is relative or that absolute truth does not exist?

4. How important is truthfulness to the Church and to the Christian life?

**APPLICATION**

1. How would you respond to Pontius Pilate's question, "What is truth?"
2. Reflect on the significance of the fact that God is truth – not simply that what He says is true, but that He Himself is truth. What is your response to this attribute of God? What should your response be?
3. Do you recall those times in your life when someone has lied to you or broken a promise to you? Do you recall those times when you have lied to others or broken promises to others? How does this reflection help you understand why God hates a lie?

**SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Charnock, Stephen. *The Existence and Attributes of God*

## NOTES