

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

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§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 1

The Infinite-Personal God

Introduction

We come now to a new section in our survey of Christian doctrine. We previously were going over the Doctrine of Revelation, and we looked at general revelation and special revelation. We have now brought that discussion to a close. Today we are starting on a new section called Doctrine of God.

As we begin a new section, it is good to remind ourselves of the purpose of the Defenders class and of our class verse. Our class verse is 1 Peter 3:15, which says, “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do this with gentleness and respect.” Our purposes in this class are three fold: (1) to train Christians to understand, articulate, and defend basic Christian truths; (2) to reach out with the Gospel to those who have not yet come to know Christ, always being ready to give a defense to anyone who should ask a reason for our hope; and (3) to be an incendiary fellowship of mutual encouragement and care.

In his morning sermon of January 7, 1855, the British minister Charles Spurgeon opened with these words:

It has been said that ‘the proper study of mankind is man.’ 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 to that same subject that we will now turn our attention.

The knowledge of God! When you think about it, this is really what life is all about: the knowledge of God. J. I. Packer in his marvelous work *Knowing God* writes as follows:

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.

The knowledge of God should be the number one priority of every Christian believer.

Knowing About God and Knowing God

But here a very important distinction needs to be made. There is an important difference between *knowing* God and *knowing about* God.¹ Knowing about God is primarily a matter of information, but knowing God involves a first-hand personal experience. To give an illustration, suppose that you were single and I was somehow able to tell you all about the guy or the girl of your dreams that someday you are going to marry. Suppose I could tell you what she looks like, her likes and dislikes, her strengths, her weaknesses, her intellectual abilities, and her spiritual maturity. You would know all about her. And yet, would you really know her? Clearly, not at all! You would have a lot of information, but there wouldn't be any personal relationship between you and her. In fact, you might say, “Wow, I can hardly wait to get to know her!” There is a clear difference between just knowing about someone and actually knowing that person. When that girl walks into your life, you will not simply know things about her, you will begin to know her.

It is exactly the same with God. We can have a lot of information about God, we can know a lot about God, and yet still not know God very well, or maybe even at all. In this kind of a class, my ability to help you know about God is considerable; but I can't really help you a lot to know God personally. That is something that you have got to do for yourself. To return to the illustration, suppose that by divine revelation I could tell you about the person you are going to marry. Still, I couldn't give you that intimate, personal relationship with her. You have to do the loving and the caring and the building yourself. It is just the same with God. I can tell you a lot about God, so that you know more about God. But only you can really come to know God for yourself. It is you who are going to have to spend the time with God, building and nurturing that intimate relationship of knowing him.

You might then ask, “Why is it even important to know about God, if that is not really the priority in life?” Very simply, it can be very helpful to have information about someone if you want to get to know that person personally. For example, if you learn that someone has a poor self image, that is going to be a very important piece of information in knowing that person and understanding how that person acts and reacts to you. Or if you know that somebody can be trusted with a secret, then that is going to give you confidence to confide in that person as a reliable and loyal friend. It is the same with God. Once we really understand what God is like, then I think it will change our lives.

When we grasp God's unconditional love, then we will be drawn to love him in return. When we truly comprehend God's holiness, then we will turn away from our sins with loathing and will reverence God with awe and trembling. When we understand God's aseity, or self-existence, then we will fall on our faces before him in humility and worship. When we see God's power, then we will go forth for him in confidence and triumph. When we learn about God's omniscience, then we will quit depreciating

¹ 5:00

ourselves, and we will learn to accept ourselves rightly, as God accepts us. Having knowledge about God can be very valuable in learning to know God personally.

The Infinite-Personal God

Who is this God, then, that reveals himself to us in the Bible? In short, he is the infinite-personal God. According to the Bible, God is both *infinite* and *personal*. Insofar as God is infinite, he is utterly unlike all the rest of reality. A great chasm separates God from the rest of reality, whether man or animals or plants or the inorganic material world.² All of these are finite, created things and utterly distinct from the infinite God. But insofar as God is personal, man stands on the same side of the chasm with God because man is created in the image of God and is therefore a personal being. And on the other side of the chasm stands the rest of the physical created world (animals, plants, and inorganic material). The God that the Bible describes is a God who is both infinite and personal [see Figure 1].

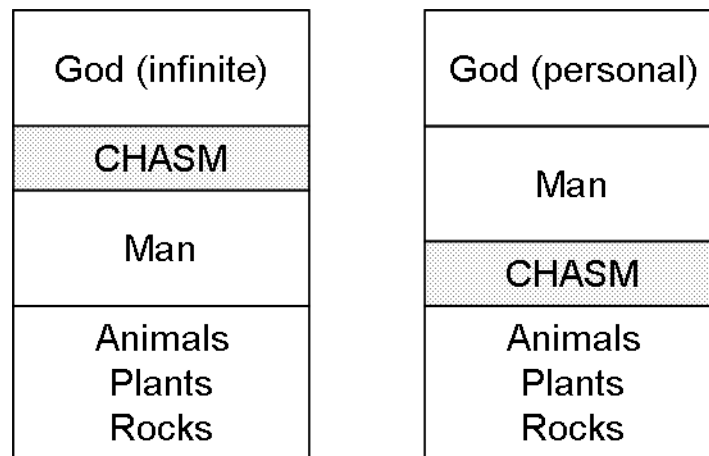


Figure 1 - Infinite-Personal God

In so conceiving of God in this way, the Judeo-Christian tradition is quite unlike the rest of the world's religions. For example, the pantheistic religions of the Orient, such as Hinduism, conceive of God as infinite, but not personal – he is just the Absolute, some sort of undifferentiated principle, but not a person. By contrast, in the religions of Greece and Rome that were fashionable during the time the New Testament was written, the gods and goddesses were personal beings (Zeus, Aphrodite, Athena, and all the rest were certainly personal beings). But they were finite, humanoid supermen and women cavorting about. They weren't infinite beings, but they were personal. In contrast to both of these, the Scripture teaches that God is both infinite and personal.

What we want to do is to begin by looking at those attributes of God which are his in virtue of his infinity, and then we'll look at the attributes of God which are his in virtue of being a personal being.

Let's talk first about God's attributes insofar as God is an infinite being. The Westminster Shorter Catechism describes God as "a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." We want to examine what

² 10:01

it means to speak of God as infinite in this way. In one sense, all of God's attributes could be described in terms of God's infinity because as belonging to an unlimited being they all share in God's infinitude. But what we want to focus on here are those attributes of God that he has that are not in virtue of being personal (that is, not a reflection or implication of his being a personal being).

By way of introduction, a lot of times you hear people today express skepticism about knowing anything of God's nature or attributes. They will say you can't know anything about God. If God does exist, then he is totally unknown. You can't say what God is really like. For these people, God is just a sort of blur, a kind of impersonal force or something. They don't think you can really talk meaningfully about the attributes of God because God is just a blank, a sort of mysterious question mark, even if he exists. In contradiction to this, such a being would in reality be a non-entity. If it were really the case that God had no attributes at all, he wouldn't exist. It would be a non-entity. Anything that exists in reality objectively (that is, something that still exists even when you are not there; it exists independently of your mind) has attributes or properties that make it what it is rather than something else. A God who had no attributes would be simply non-existent. It wouldn't be anything at all.³

The 19th century German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach made this point when he wrote the following:

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 to what is yet remaining of his religious conscience 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 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

I think that was well put by Feuerbach!

So God, as an infinite being, must have some sort of attributes or properties that make him what he is rather than something else. The question then is, what are these properties? What are the attributes that go to make up God's nature? Here God has fortunately not left it up to us to work it out by our own ingenuity what he is like. Rather he has revealed himself to us in his Word, which is why we began with the Doctrine of Revelation. The Bible is the storybook of God's revealing acts in history, his self-

³ 14:56

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

revelation in the history of the world and particularly of the nation of Israel, telling us what he is like. So it is to the Scriptures that we must turn in order to discover what God is like. What I want to do is to look at four of God's infinite attributes as taught in Scripture. Under each one, what we will do is first look at an analysis of the attribute, looking at the Scriptural data in support of that attribute. Then we will summarize it, and finally we will look at its application to our lives – what difference does it make that we have such a conception of God, that God possesses the attribute that we are discussing?

DISCUSSION

Question: Before you continue, can you discuss what you mean by “infinite,” since later on you will talk about how an actual infinite is illogical.

Answer: When we talk about the concept of infinity, I think there are two ways to conceive of it. One would be what I would call a *quantitative* concept. This would be the concept of infinity that plays a role in mathematics. In mathematics, for example, if you talk about the set of natural numbers $\{0, 1, 2, 3 \dots\}$, the number of elements in this set is infinite in this quantitative sense. The number of elements in the set is an infinite number. What that means is that there is an infinite number of definite and discrete members in the collection. To say it is quantitative is to say that there is a certain number of definite and discrete elements in the collection. By contrast to this, we could think of infinity as a *qualitative* notion.⁵ As a qualitative notion, infinity would not be a collection that is composed of an infinite number of definite and discrete elements. So, for example, if we talk about God's love as “infinite,” what we mean is that it is unconditional, it is boundless; but we don't mean that it is somehow made up of a collection of definite and discrete parts which are infinite in number. The love of God's being infinite is not a quantitative notion. Or when we talk about God's moral perfection and his holiness and we say he is infinitely good or holy, again that is not a quantitative notion. We don't mean that there are units of holiness, and God has an infinite number of these units. It is more a qualitative infinity. So when we talk about infinity with respect to God, we should use the word as a qualitative notion. In fact, in one sense, there really isn't a separate attribute of God called “infinity.” As you will see, we will not study any attribute of God called “infinity.” Rather this is simply an umbrella term that really describes all of God's various attributes: his love is boundless, his holiness is perfect, his omnipotence means he is all-powerful, his omniscience means that he knows all truth and believes no falsehoods. If you were to take away God's holiness, omnipotence, omniscience, aseity, and all the other attributes, it is not as though there will be some attribute left over called “infinity” that he would still have. Rather this is a qualitative notion that describes all of God's attributes in the way he has them in this sort of boundless fashion. I hope that is clear. This will become more important later on when we talk about whether or not the series of past events is infinite or not, or had a beginning.

Question: Talking about God's infinite qualities, does God have any qualities that are not infinite such as his anger against certain peoples?

Answer: I don't think that it is as though God has finite qualities as opposed to infinite

⁵ 20:02

qualities. As I said, I think you can think of all of God's qualities as infinite in the sense I am using the word. It might be more accurate to make this division between God's personal attributes and non-personal attributes. When I talk about these attributes like self-existence and so forth, I am saying that these are attributes that he has not in virtue of being a person. But we will talk about things like his love when we talk about his personal attributes. But clearly his love is infinite, so in that sense he is infinite in every respect.

Question: What about his existence within the temporal world? I remember you talking some time ago about him being infinite and then becoming temporal.

Answer: This gets into the notion of God's eternity, and that will be one of the attributes that we talk about. I think what we'll want to say with respect to eternity is that God's existence is permanent, that is to say, he never began to exist, and he never will cease to exist. In that sense, he is infinite. But how he relates to time will be controversial and will require some teasing out in order to try to understand it. If time had a beginning at creation and God entered into time at that moment, then God has existed for only a finite amount of time, about 13.7 billion years. But that doesn't mean he began to exist because he existed without time in the state of being alone without creation. God exists without time even if he exists in time with creation. We will talk about that more later on, but I think we can still say his existence is infinite in the sense that it is permanent: he never began and will never cease to exist.⁶

Question: (inaudible) . . . almost exists outside of time, but he never really entered into it?

Answer: I want to save this discussion until we get to the attribute of eternity. We are going to talk about this in considerable detail, and certainly the classical understanding of God in Christian theology has been that God exists outside of time, that he is timeless. It is not as though he endured through an infinite number of times and then decided a finite time ago to create the world. That is typically not the view that Christian theology holds. It typically holds to God's timelessness, that he transcends time. But we will talk more about that later.

Question: How do we answer the Gnostic claim about God being created by Sophia or some other Godhood?

Answer: There are two levels on which this kind of question could be answered. The reason we started with Doctrine of Revelation in this class is so that we have an authoritative source of teaching about God. What you would do is show scripturally that these Gnostic heretics were and are mistaken in thinking that there is some other principle or being beyond God. This is what the church fathers like Irenaeus did in attacking these Gnostics. As Christian apologists, on the other hand, I think we can give some arguments for thinking that God has these sorts of attributes and that we have to get back to a sort of ultimate, uncreated being who is personal and transcends time and space and so forth. So those would be the ways I would try to deal with those kinds of people. On the one hand scripturally and then on the other hand you can give some philosophical arguments, too.

Question: Would it be right to say that once a person is conceived, we do have a starting point, but from then on we are an infinite creature?

⁶ 25:10

Answer: This is a good question. Here we have to make a different distinction with respect to infinity. I talked about quantitative versus qualitative notions of infinity, but even within quantitative infinity, there is another distinction to be drawn between what is called an actual infinite and what is called a potential infinite. An actual infinite would be a collection, like the set of natural numbers, which has a number of elements in it that is greater than any natural number. The set of natural numbers is actually infinite, the set of all points in space is actually infinite, things of that sort. But potential infinity is the notion of an indefinite collection. This would be a collection which is never actually infinite, but it is growing toward infinity as a limit. For example, if I divide the distance between the corners of this podium in half, and then I divide it in half again, and then in half again, that can keep on going forever – and infinity will be a limit which I will never reach because there will only ever be a finite number of divisions. But it goes on forever. It goes on ceaselessly. In that sense, you could say it is potentially infinite. I would say with respect to human beings who begin to exist at a point in time at the moment of conception but who will live forever because they have a soul that will live in connection with the resurrection body forever, that they will live for potentially infinite time into the future. They will never be an actually infinite number of years old. Given that they began to exist, at any time if you ask them, “How old are you?,” the answer will always be a finite number, no matter how far into the future you go. But they will just go on forever – infinity is just a limit that you approach but you never get to.⁷

Question: How did the term “infinity” get applied to the Christian God – my understanding is there is no word for infinite in Hebrew, and the Greek word for infinite is not used in the New Testament. But the word began to be used in the early creeds.

Answer: I really can’t say, historically, when the word “infinite” first began to be applied to God by church fathers. I strongly suspect it would be under the influence of Greek philosophy which had conceptions of God or the One as being beyond all finitude and aptly described in that way. So this would be one example of the contribution of philosophy to Christian doctrine. As we will see, Scripture is often underdeterminative with respect to these attributes of God. By that I mean that they don’t make it entirely clear how we are to conceive of a particular attribute of God. For example, the Scripture says that God is eternal; but does that mean that he has existed for infinite time and always will? Or does it mean that he is timeless? The Scripture isn’t altogether clear on that. The Scripture refers to God as “almighty,” “all-powerful;” it says he can do anything. But what does that mean? How do you cash that out? I think here philosophy can help us to cash out some of these attributes of God in ways that will exalt and magnify God. I would say that we ought to construe these attributes, like God’s being all-mighty, or all-knowing, in the strongest possible terms that we can because God is the greatest conceivable being and only retreat from that if we are forced to. The doctrine of God’s infinity is something that is rooted in Scripture; as we will see it affirms things like his all-mightiness and his all-knowingness, his all-presence, his creating everything outside of himself. Then it will be up to us to try to systematize that to make sense of that attribute, and in so doing I think we will bring in some of these philosophical concepts.⁸

⁷ 30:35

⁸ Total Running Time: 34:05 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 2

Infinite: Self-Existence

Infinite: Self-Existence

The first of God's infinite attributes that we want to discuss is God's self-existence. What we first want to do is to look at an analysis of this attribute before seeing what practical application this has to our lives. First, we want to look at scriptural data supporting the notion that God has the property of self-existence.

Scriptural Data

First, *God is the source of all reality outside himself.*

John 1:1-3: "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."

Here John talks about the uncreated Word which was God that existed simply "in the beginning." By contrast, all things that have come into being, he says in verse 3, have done so through the creative power of the Word. So there is a distinction drawn here between God, the uncreated Creator, and all the rest of creation, which depends for its existence upon God and his Word. God is set apart as uniquely self-existent and uncreated.

Also, Revelation 4:11. Here it describes the heavenly worship of God in his throne room that John sees, and in this verse we read that they sing before God: "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 again God is the uncreated Creator of all things, and therefore he is given glory and honor and power by those who worship him.

Finally, Isaiah 40:17-23 and then also 28a:

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 contrasts the God of Israel with the gods worshiped by Israel's pagan neighbors. He says these are mere creatures, idols built by craftsman, whereas God is the creator of all things, creator of the ends of the Earth, the everlasting God without beginning and end. He is the truly self-existent one.

Scripture indicates that all of reality, other than God himself, finds its source in God. That is the first point that I want to make here. The Scripture shows the source of all reality outside of God is God himself.⁹

Secondly, *God not only created the world, but he also preserves it in being.*

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 God is not only the one who creates everything in heaven and on Earth, but he also preserves them in existence. So he not only created the world but God is the preserver and conservator of the world as well.

Thirdly, the Scripture indicates that *God is the source, the sustainer, and the goal of all reality outside himself.*

Romans 11:36, Paul's doxology of praise to God: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

Notice there that God is the source, he is the sustainer, and he is the goal of all things. From him, through him, and to him are all things that exist. We might also compare in the same connection the book of Hebrews 2:10 where it uses the phrase, "for whom and by whom all things exist." So God is the source, sustainer, and goal of all reality other than himself.

Fourthly, *God just exists.* He doesn't have a cause or an explanation – he just exists.

Psalms 90:2: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God."

From infinity to infinity, from everlasting to everlasting, God just exists. The other things that exist have been brought into being, they have been created, but God just exists. We might compare in this connection Exodus 3:14 where God reveals his name to Moses as "I am that I am." God just exists. "God said to Moses, 'I AM who I AM'. And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"" So God is a self-existent being.

Finally, the last point is that *all of these same qualities are applied to Christ in the New Testament.* All of these same properties are ascribed to Jesus Christ.

For example, 1 Corinthians 8:5-6. Paul says:

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

⁹ 4:57

whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Notice the way in which Christ and God the Father are described in similar terms. The Father is God, from whom all things exist and for whom we exist, and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Also, 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.

Notice there that Christ is described as the one who is the creator of the world, he is the heir of all things, the one who inherits everything that has been made, he reflects God's glory, bears the very imprint of God's nature and he also preserves the universe in being, upholding it by his word of power. So all of these marvelous properties that are attributed to God are also ascribed to Christ.¹⁰

Finally, Colossians 1:15-17, speaking of Christ:

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.

Notice, again, there Christ is said to be the visible image of the invisible God. You cannot see God – he is spirit –, but the incarnate Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He is the first born of all creation, that is to say, the heir. The first born is the heir of all creation. So creation is for him, it belongs to him. And it indeed says, in verse 16, all things were created by him, in heaven and on Earth. So outside of God himself, everything is created by Christ. Not only that, he says that all things were created through him but also for him, so that he is the goal, the end, of creation. He is before all things, and then he preserves all things. In him all things hold together. He is the one who conserves it in being. He not only created it, but he holds it together in him as he conserves it in being.

All of these remarkable properties that belong to God are also attributed to Christ.

DISCUSSION

Question: Christ is the first born implies heir. Does it not also imply first born from the dead?

Answer: Paul does mention that in verse 18, where it says, “He is the beginning, the first born from the dead,” and there I take it he is talking about the resurrection. He is the first fruits that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 15 of the general resurrection that will occur. But in verse 15, the first born of creation cannot mean that he is the first created thing because it says in verse 16, “in him all things were created” and then again “all things

¹⁰ 10:46

were created through him.” So there the sense of the “first born” is not a chronological sense, but more the sense he is the heir of creation, which we saw in Hebrews and other passages of Paul as well.

Question: You mentioned earlier that some attributes of God are “underdeterminative.” Are you going to mention when you feel this is the case? Do you think, in this case, this concept of aseity is conclusive?

Answer: We can certainly do that as we go along. When we get to the systematic summary, I will try to summarize this, and I do think that the view that we’ll have of God as a self-existent being will exceed the scriptural data because the scriptural data don’t speak to the fact of whether or not God exists as sort of a logically necessary being. These sorts of categories are not categories in which these people were thinking (metaphysical and logical possibility). But they clearly do intend us to think of God as the source of all reality outside of himself, as uncreated. I think, in view of God’s being the greatest conceivable being, that it is quite appropriate to extend the concept of self-existence so as to think of God as not only uncaused but also metaphysically necessary.¹¹

Question: Are you going to speak to the early church controversy over Arius versus the rest of the church on the begetting of Christ versus his existing?

Answer: This question is one that is really applicable to the Doctrine of Christ, rather than to the Doctrine of God proper. So we will take up that question when we get to the Doctrine of Christ, and we will see how Arius and those who followed him brought a challenge to the early church about the deity of Christ and in particular whether or not thinking of Christ as begotten by the Father meant that he was a created thing. We will see that the church rejects that view, and it issued a great statement at Nicaea that is often recited especially in liturgical churches today called the Nicene Creed. Hang on to that, and we will eventually get to it.

Systematic Summary

Definition

Let’s do a little systematic summary of this data and try to make sense of it. What we want to say on the basis of this material is that God is a self-existent being. That is to say, all of finite reality depends upon God for its creation, for its present existing, and for its future being. He brings it into existence, he sustains it in being, and it will remain in being so long as he sustains it and conserves it into the future. In other words, all of reality outside of God is shot through with a radical dependence. It is in existence only so long as God creates and sustains its existence. Were he to withdraw his creative power, the universe would be annihilated in a blink of an eye.

A good analogy for this, if you are having difficulty understanding it, would be to think of when you dream. In a dream, you have people, events going on, a whole world is created in your dream. There are actions and interactions, conversations happening, events going on in this dream world. But that dream world is radically contingent upon

¹¹ 14:57

you to maintain it in existence, as you continue to think. The moment you wake up, it vanishes in a flash and no longer exists. The actual world around us that is so real and seems so solid and robust is shot through with that same kind of radical dependency upon God for its existence.

Now don't misunderstand me! I am *not* saying that this is all a dream and it is unreal and this is some kind of virtual reality. I'm just using this as an analogy to say that in the same way the dream world is radically dependent upon its creator for its existence, this physical world, this universe, is radically dependent upon God for its existence. If there were no God, there would be no universe. By contrast, if there were no universe, God would be unaffected. He would still exist just as robustly as he ever had. Nothing can make God cease to exist. Quite the contrary, everything else that exists depends upon him for its existence. He could unthink them in an instant, and they would be annihilated.

But God's self-existence should be construed in the greatest possible way. This means that it should be taken to mean not only that God is uncreated but also that he is metaphysically necessary. Thus, there is a great distinction within being between God's being and the being of everything else. God's existence is necessary, whereas his non-existence is impossible. As a self-existent being, God doesn't just happen to exist, rather he exists necessarily.

Solution to Two Problems

This conception can help to solve two problems that are very often raised about the existence of God. One is the charge made, for example, by the atheist Canadian philosopher Kai Nielsen, that if God is a being, then he is just one being among others. What is so special about God? If God is a being, then he is just one being among others. It is like having a bunch of marbles in a can, and God is just one of the marbles in the can. If he is a being, as we believe, then he is just one of many. We can see that that is quite false because all other beings are dependent upon God for their existence, whereas God is completely independent of them. Philosophers draw the distinction between necessary existence and contingent existence. God is a necessary being. His non-existence is impossible; he exists necessarily. By contrast, all other beings are contingent – they are contingent upon God as the independent, self-existent one.¹² So it is not true that if God is a being, he is just one among many. Quite the contrary, God is the source and sustainer of all contingent beings, and he is the only metaphysically necessary being that exists.

The second problem that this helps to solve is the old question, "Where did God come from?" If God exists, then why does God exist? What is the cause of God? Once we understand the concept of God as a necessary being, then you can see that this is a question which is, if not meaningless, then at least obtuse. It is sort of asking, "Why is it that all bachelors are unmarried?" Nobody racks his brain trying to figure out why it is that every bachelor you meet is unmarried. Why? Because the very concept of a bachelor is that of an unmarried male. Similarly, the concept of God as the greatest conceivable being is that of a necessary being. Therefore, it is impossible for God not to exist. His non-existence is impossible. God had no beginning, he depends upon nothing, he cannot

¹² 20:21

not exist. Therefore, the question, “Where did God come from?” or “Why does God exist?” simply shows that the person asking the question doesn’t understand the concept of a necessary, self-existent being.

For those who press the question, when you are in conversation with them, “Where did God come from?” I think you can return with the following question: “If there is no God, then where did the universe come from?” On the atheistic view, you have got to believe that the universe is self-existent, unless you think it just popped into being uncaused out of nothing, which seems absurd. That is worse than magic. So on the atheistic view, you have got to believe the universe is a self-existent, necessary being, which is exactly the same thing that we believe about God. In other words, what the atheist is forced to do is simply to substitute the universe in the place of God. That is exactly what the natural man does. Look at Romans 1:20-23:

Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

In other words, the error of the natural man apart from God is to substitute the creature in the place of the Creator. Rather than worship and serve the Creator, he worships and serves the creature in place of God. So creation is arrogated to the place of God – it becomes the self-existent, uncreated source of all things, which is exactly the essence of unbelief.

The atheist himself, unless he is prepared to say the universe just popped into being uncaused out of nothing, is himself committed to some sort of a self-existent being. Once we understand the concept of God, there is no difficulty in thinking of God as an uncreated, necessarily existent being who is the source of all remaining reality.

DISCUSSION

Question: Some atheists just say, “The Big Bang created the universe, and evolution just took over after that.” How do you answer that objection?

Answer: The question is, if they think the universe came from the Big Bang, ask them why did the Big Bang occur? That is the origin of all matter and energy. Do they think that just popped into being, uncaused out of nothing? If they believe that, that is worse than magic because in magic at least when the rabbit is pulled out of the hat by the magician, you got the magician. But in this case, the universe would just pop into being uncaused out of absolutely nothing, which is even worse. So that is a worse alternative than saying the universe is self-existent and uncreated. But if they say that, then they have no objection to God’s being self-existent and uncreated.¹³

¹³ 25:32

Question: I don't think the universe can logically be self-existent because the universe has a law of cause and effect. God exists outside of universe's law of cause and effect and thus can be a First, Uncaused Cause.

Answer: We will talk more about this when we get to the arguments for the existence of God. There are two ways you can attack the idea that the universe is self-existent and necessary in its being. One would be to show that the universe is not eternal in the past, that the series of causes and effects has a beginning, so that you get back to a first cause in a temporal sense, and you have to ask, where did that first event come from? That would show the universe isn't self-existent because it had a beginning. The other way would be to say that even if the universe is eternal, nevertheless the universe is contingent in some way. It isn't necessary that this universe exists, and you would try to show that this universe, the conglomeration of the things that exist, isn't necessary in its being. For example, if you think of all the things in the universe, chairs and planets and galaxies and so forth, none of these things seems to exist necessarily. We can conceive of a universe where none of these things exists, and in fact at a point in the past, none of them did! The atheist might say, "Yeah, but the stuff out of which they are made is necessary – the quarks, the fundamental particles of which things are made, electrons – those are necessary in their being." But then it is very plausible to say, couldn't a different set of quarks have existed than the set of quarks that do exist? Couldn't there have been one less quark, or a different collection of quarks than these? I think it would take some real chutzpah on the atheist's part to say that not only does the universe exist necessarily and is self-existent, but that every single quark in the universe is self-existent and exists necessarily. Those would be two ways in which we could argue along the lines that you are arguing to say that the universe isn't a plausible candidate for being a self-existent, necessary being. If that is the case, then there must be an extra- or ultra-mundane, transcendent cause of the universe which is the explanation and source of its being.

Question: I heard an objection regarding the Big Bang theory. If there were a Big Bang, scientists should be able to see all planets and the like emanating from a central point, but they haven't been able to do that.

Answer: The question is based on a misunderstanding of the Big Bang theory. The picture of the Big Bang is not the picture that we have of an explosion, where you have a central point that you described and then everything goes out from that central point in all directions. That is not the picture – the theory is much more radical than that. Your picture is one in which there is a kind of preexisting empty space, sort of like an empty box, and there is a point in space that blows up and things go out in all directions. That is not the theory. The theory is that space and time themselves originate in this event.¹⁴ So the way to picture it is like the surface of a balloon, and the galaxies would be like buttons glued on the surface of the balloon. As you inflate the balloon, the galaxies stay in the same place, they are stuck on the balloon, they are glued, but as the balloon stretches, the galaxies (buttons) recede from each other and get farther and farther apart as the balloon gets bigger. If you trace this back in time, they get closer and closer together until they finally all coalesce to a beginning of the expansion. But on the surface of the balloon there is no central point. No matter which button you are sitting on, as you

¹⁴ 30:02

look out, you see the other buttons moving away from you. The surface of the balloon has no center. The theory of the Big Bang is that space is the three dimensional analogue of the two-dimensional surface of the balloon. We should not think of it in terms of a central point which is blowing up. Rather it is the origin of all matter and energy, space and time themselves, which just cries out for some sort of transcendent Creator beyond the universe, which brought space and time, matter and energy, into existence.

We will talk about that in much more detail when we get to the Doctrine of Creation and arguments for God's existence, but it is relevant here at least in showing that unless you are willing to say the universe just popped into being out of nothing, we are all committed to some kind of a self-existent reality that is the ultimate source of everything that exists. The Christian or the theist says it is God, the atheist says it is the universe. But in either case, one is committed to a self-existent being, and as a self-existent being God cannot and does not have any further cause or explanation of his existence. Rather he simply exists necessarily, and everything else that exists is contingent upon him for its existence. Everything was created by him, sustained in being by him, and he is the end to which everything exists.¹⁵

¹⁵ Total Running Time: 33:05 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 3

How Christian Theology Determines a Divine Attribute

How Christian Theology Determines a Divine Attribute

We have been talking about divine aseity. Before we look at this specifically, I want to say something more about how Christian theology determines a divine attribute. I think a question from last week helped to raise a point that needs clarification. Remember I said that the Scriptures are often underdeterminative with regard to these divine attributes. For example, Scripture teaches that God is eternal, but it doesn't tell us clearly whether he is timeless or everlasting throughout time. Therefore, the issue cannot be decided simply scripturally.

Christian theologians have studied the doctrine of God under the exercise of two controls. The first and foremost would be holy Scripture: what do the Scriptures have to say about God's attributes? The second would be what we would call "perfect being theology." This is based on St. Anselm's idea of God as the greatest conceivable being, or the most perfect being. Anselm quite rightly said that when you think about the concept of God, God is by definition the greatest conceivable being. If you could conceive of anything greater than God, then *that* would be God. So by the very concept of God, God is the greatest conceivable being – the perfect being. If we think of God that way, that means that in developing our doctrine of God, we will want to understand God's scriptural attributes in the greatest fashion possible. He would have those attributes that would go to extol or magnify his greatness. These attributes would be what we might call "great-making" attributes; they would be consistent with God's being the most perfect being.

When we come to the subject of God's self-existence that we've been looking at, we can say that the Scripture clearly teaches that God is uncreated and independent of anything else. Everything other than God depends upon God for its existence, whereas God depends upon nothing. He never came into existence; he will never cease to exist. So there is what one might call a sort of factual necessity about God's being. Factual necessity would mean that God exists necessarily in the sense that he is uncreated, he is eternal, he is incorruptible, and he is indestructible.

But there is an even stronger conception of God's necessity, which we can call logical necessity. That is the necessity that would hold that God not only is uncreated, eternal, incorruptible, and indestructible, but that it is impossible for God to not exist. To say God does not exist is like saying a bachelor is married – it is just incoherent. It is logically necessary that God exists. So if God's existence is logically necessary, the statement "God exists" isn't just true accidentally – it doesn't just happen to be true; it is necessarily true. It is a necessary truth. It is like "All bachelors are unmarried" or "The three angles of a Euclidean triangle add up to 180 degrees."

Why should we think of God's existence as necessary in the stronger sense – not just

factually necessary, but logically necessary? The first reason would be because of perfect being theology. It is much greater to have logically necessary existence, than to just accidentally exist, even if that means you are eternal and uncaused and indestructible and incorruptible.¹⁶ It is more perfect to exist necessarily. It is greater to exist necessarily, and so perfect being theology would require that God exist necessarily.

The second reason is that many of the arguments for God's existence conclude to God as a logically necessary being. We haven't discussed these yet, but we will eventually. For example, the famous cosmological argument based upon the contingency of the world – why does something exist rather than nothing? – ultimately gets back to a being which must exist and is the sufficient reason for the existence of everything else and whose non-existence is impossible. So if this version of the cosmological argument is sound, it proves that there must be a logically necessary being which explains why anything else exists. Or a conceptualist argument for God's existence where you think of God as an omniscient mind who is the grounding for all necessary truths and who is the grounding for mathematical objects. Things of this sort would require a God whose existence is logically necessary because some of these truths are logically necessary. If you have logically necessary truths and these need to be grounded in somebody's mind, then that mind, that being, would have to be as logically necessary as the truths it grounds. Another argument for God's existence, the moral argument, says that we need God to ground moral values. Since these moral values are necessary and not just accidental, you need a necessary being to ground these necessary moral values. For example, it is morally necessary that torturing a child for fun is wrong. That isn't true just in this world; that is true in any possible world. That is a logically necessary, moral truth. If God has to exist in order to ground those moral truths, he has to be as logically necessary as those truths.

So I think we have very good reasons for thinking, as I explained last week, that God is self-existent, not just in the sense that he is eternal and uncreated and incorruptible and indestructible, but that it is literally impossible for God not to exist. His existence is logically necessary. I hope that clarifies a bit the procedure for looking at God's attributes and why I say we ought to think of God as a logically necessary being.

The Challenge of Platonism

We now come to a challenge to the doctrine of God's self-existence, the challenge of Platonism. This challenge to divine aseity is the center of my current [2008] research interest. I have been studying this now for several years and therefore am delighted to have a chance to share with you a little bit about this.

What is the challenge posed by Platonism to divine aseity? To motivate your grasp of this problem, let me ask a question: do numbers exist? What do you think? Does the number 3 exist? For example, there are three people at this table – Dennis and Jim and Donald. But does the number 3 also exist? I am not talking about the numeral “3” – certainly the numeral “3” exists. There it is, in that sentence right there. But does the number 3 exist?

Platonists say, yes. Plato was one of the most famous of the ancient Greek philosophers, and Plato believed that things like numbers and mathematical objects and geometric figures, like the perfect circle, exist more “really,” more robustly than the things around

¹⁶ 5:07

us in the physical world. Plato actually thought that the things in the physical world were like shadows, a mere shadowy existence, compared to the reality of these abstract objects like numbers and geometrical figures.¹⁷ He thought that these abstract entities were the ultimate reality.

What would be some examples of these sorts of abstract objects? Platonists today take their cue from Plato, though they don't hold exactly the same view as Plato does. But they would say that there are these abstract entities. Mathematical objects would be the primary example of these things. Things like numbers or sets – if you remember set theory in your high school algebra class. Or functions. Or, in geometry, geometrical figures or different kinds of geometries – planar geometry or geometry of a sphere or of a saddle. All of these are different, competing geometries. And those geometrical objects would be abstract objects.

But there are other kinds of abstract objects besides mathematical ones, if they exist. Propositions would be abstract objects. What do I mean by that? A proposition is the information content of a sentence. For example, the sentence “Snow is white” and the sentence “Der Schnee ist weiß” are different sentences – one is in English and one is in German; they are not the same sentence – but they both have the same information content, namely, that snow is white. Philosophers will say that they both express the same proposition and that while these sentences are linguistic entities on paper or spoken into the air, propositions aren't linguistic entities; they are abstract objects. It is the information content conveyed by those sentences. Even if no one had ever spoken the sentence, “Snow is white,” the proposition would still be true.

What would be another example of abstract objects? Some philosophers think that properties are abstract objects. The property of *being green*, for example. The greenness of one plant and the greenness of another plant are the same; they have the same property. But obviously, it is not the greenness that is in a leaf in the first plant which is the greenness in a leaf in the other plant because they are spatially separated. This one plant has its own greenness and that other plant has its own greenness. They are not the same greenness in the sense of the green that you see; nevertheless, they have the same color. So, in some way, they both have the same property. Some philosophers, like my colleague J. P. Moreland, think that greenness is an abstract object that exists beyond time and space and that these two plants both exemplify that abstract object of *being green*. So properties would be another example of abstract objects.

What is significant about this? Many of these abstract objects, if they exist, exist necessarily. They are not created; they exist necessarily. For example, if the number 2 exists, it exists necessarily. If propositions exist, they exist necessarily. They may be true or false in different worlds, but in the world in which there are no concrete objects – no space and time – the following propositions would be true: *There are no concrete objects*, or *There is no space or time*. You can't get rid of these propositions. Propositions, properties, mathematical objects – these things exist necessarily, if they exist.

That is a threat to Christian theology because Christian theology says that God is the uniquely self-existent, necessary being and that everything else that exists depends upon

¹⁷ 10:09

him for existence. If you remember in John 1:3 it says that God created everything outside of himself. Remember, it said, “In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. All things came into being through him and without him nothing came into being.” If these abstract entities exist, that means that they exist independently of God – they are self-existent, necessary in their being, and therefore God is reduced to just one being among many. In fact, God would be an infinitesimal part of reality compared to the infinity of numbers and mathematical objects. There are endless, infinities of infinities of these objects. God’s creation of the physical world would be an infinitesimal triviality compared to the realms of uncreated being over which he exercised no creative control at all.¹⁸

This view, Platonism, results in a sort of metaphysical pluralism. That is to say, there is no single metaphysical ultimate; there is no peak of the pyramid that is the metaphysically ultimate being that accounts for everything else. Rather there is just this diversity of necessary, self-existent, uncreated beings of which God happens to be one. It seems to me that that is deeply problematic for Christian theology. For that reason, a serious Christian cannot be a Platonist.

DISCUSSION

Question: You said J. P. Moreland agrees that abstract objects exist. He seems to be a fairly good Christian philosopher, so I am curious to know how he resolves this problem.

Answer: J. P. will adopt the first solution that I am going to propose. When we get to the solutions, that will be his way out. If you read our book, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, when you come to this section on the attributes of God on divine aseity, this was the only place in the book we couldn’t agree. So what we did there was I wrote one paragraph, J. P. wrote the next paragraph, saying, “Ah, but. . . !,” and I wrote the next paragraph responding to him, and then he wrote the final paragraph responding to me, and we just left it like that.

Question: I heard you say that abstract objects are effete, that they do not have any causal power. Do you still stand by that?

Answer: Yes. What makes an object abstract? It can’t be simply that it is beyond space and time because God is beyond space and time. But he is the paradigm of a concrete object! He is active in the world; he creates the world. Angels, too, would be concrete objects, even though they would be immaterial, or spiritual, substances. An abstract object doesn’t mean an immaterial entity. It doesn’t mean an entity beyond space and time. What is an abstract object anyway? The defining characteristic of an abstract object seems to be that it is essentially causally impotent. It doesn’t stand in causal relations to anything. The number 7 has no effects; it can’t cause anything. This seems to be generally agreed among metaphysicians. The defining characteristic that makes an object abstract is its causal impotency or its effeteness.

Question: That being said, you left out moral law as an abstract object. How do you define that? And what about laws of logic. Both seem to have an effect on the world – do

¹⁸ 15:12

you consider them abstract?

Answer: I would consider those abstract objects. I would say neither of those have causal effects. Take the moral law, for example. The moral law doesn't cause people to do things. It doesn't have any impact on the world. It is just that if you do things in violation of the moral law, then God will hold you responsible for that, and you will need forgiveness or punishment.

Question: Does that flow necessarily out of his nature, or have you shifted your view?

Answer: I have not. We will talk about that when we get to God's goodness. I will ground moral values, not in a Platonic realm of abstract objects like Justice or Fairness or Compassion the way Plato would. I will ground them in God's moral nature as features of God's character. He is a concrete object.

Question: What would you say the perception of an abstract object is – is it a new abstract object?

Answer: This is a very, very interesting question! One of the main objections to Platonism is, if there are these objects out there, which have no causal impact on us, how can we know about them? They would be as inscrutable to us as what's happening right now in a village in Nepal. How can anybody know? And yet we do know that $2+2$ equals 4. How do we know that, if 2 and 4 exist beyond space and time and have no impact upon the world?¹⁹ This is a real problem for Platonism; but I am not going to talk about that because my objection to Platonism is theological, not epistemological. But that is a real problem – Platonism has real difficulty explaining how we can have mathematical knowledge of these objects.

Question: Have the philosophers considered human language? Numbers don't exist without an intellect, either human or divine. Similarly, languages don't exist without an intellect. If all people that could speak or knew a language were removed from the Earth, does that language exist?

Answer: We will see that some people sympathize with your point of view. Certainly the language itself wouldn't exist unless it is some sort of abstract entity that may not be spoken by anyone. Let me turn to the solutions, and I think that you will see that some people sympathize with this point of view.

Solutions to Platonism

How can we deal with this challenge that is posed to Christian theology by Platonism? The first solution is what we might call "Absolute Creationism." What this would hold is that God creates these abstract objects. They are, in fact, created by God, and he may even create them from eternity past. They depend for their being upon God's existence. So there are these abstract objects, they really exist, but they are in fact created by God.

That is an obvious and seemingly very attractive solution – just make these things part of creation! But there seems to be a fatal problem with that solution. It seems to confront a vicious circle problem. Namely, in order for God to create some of these abstract objects,

¹⁹ 19:58

they would already have to exist. For example, suppose God wants to create the property of *being powerful*. He would already have to be powerful in order to create the property of *being powerful*. You are in a vicious circle: you can't create the property of *being powerful* unless you already have the property of *being powerful*. Think about numbers. Suppose God wanted to create the number 1. Before he creates the number 1, how many Gods are there? Well, there is one. And so 1 is the number of Gods there are. Or how many persons are in the Trinity before God creates numbers? Three; so 3 is the number of persons in the Trinity. So the numbers already exist before God creates them. You are in a vicious circle! Frankly, I don't see any way out of this. It seems to me this is a decisive objection to Absolute Creationism. It runs into this bootstrapping problem or this vicious circularity that makes it untenable as a solution of the problem.

That takes us to the next possible solution. Absolute Creationism is not, in fact, the view that Christian theologians have adopted with respect to this problem. Rather the majority of Christian theologians have opted for the second alternative: "Conceptualism." St. Augustine, influenced by Plato, recognized the importance of these Platonic entities, these abstract entities, but he also understood this was incompatible with the Christian doctrine of God. So what did he do? He moved the realm of Platonic objects into the mind of God and said what these really are are God's ideas. So he was led to the doctrine of divine ideas. So when we talk about the number 1 or the property of *being green*, what we are talking about is intellectual content of God's mind. This has been the majority viewpoint of Christian theologians down through history, a kind of Conceptualism according to which abstract objects have being as the ideas of God.

This is a viable option today, although it is not without problems. For example, it doesn't really solve the problem about how we actually can know about these things. Granted, they are not in some Platonic heaven, but they are in God's mind. So how do we have access to these things to know that $2+2=4$ if 2 and 4 are just an idea in the mind of God?²⁰ Or if I talk about the set of three men at this table and I form the idea of that set, that is not the same set as the idea that God forms because if the set of three men is God's idea, then that is not my idea. I have a different idea. Conceptualism is not without its problems, though I think it is a good position and a defensible position. But it is not as though it doesn't face difficulties.

Some have been led to go even farther and to say, "Why think that these things exist at all? Why think that there are such things as numbers and properties and so forth?" This is the position of "Nominalism." Nominalism says that these abstract objects are just useful fictions; they don't really exist. They are just useful fictions, artifacts of language. It is just the way we talk. To give an illustration, suppose I say "The average American family has 2.5 children." That's true, right? But there isn't any such thing as "the average American family," much less two and a half children! There isn't *any* family in this country that has two and a half children in it! So the average American family is just a kind of useful fiction that we use to describe the mean number of children in U.S. families.

²⁰ 25:09

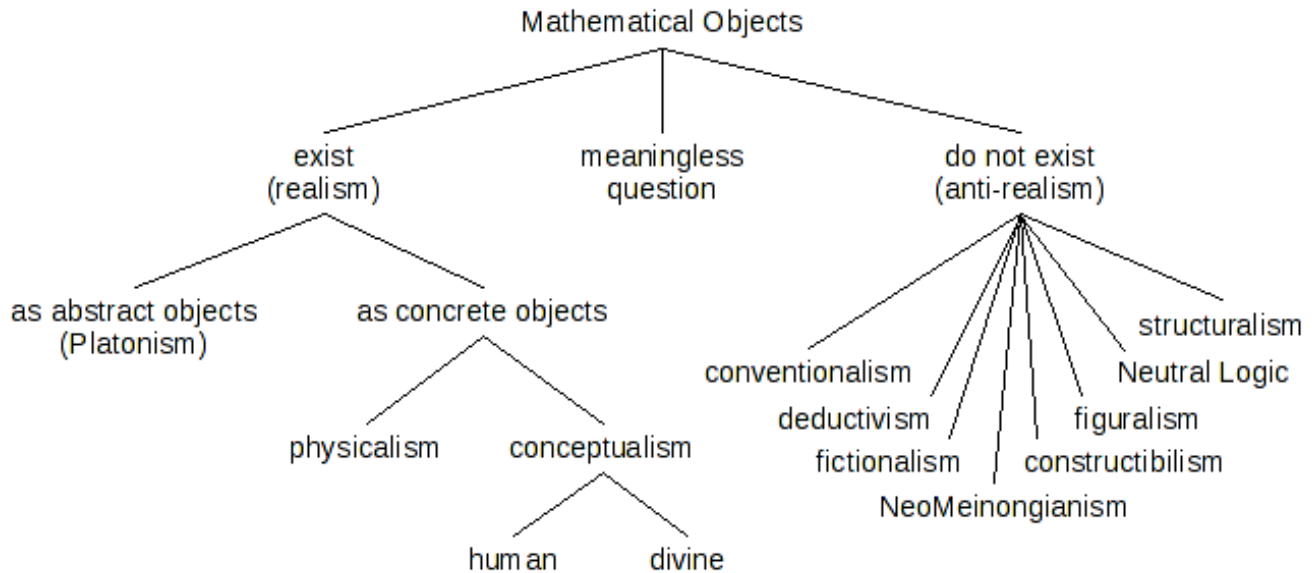


Fig. 1: Some metaphysical options concerning the existence of mathematical objects.

There are three positions with respect to mathematical objects (Fig. 1). Either they exist (realism) or they don't exist (anti-realism). The third position, in the middle, is that this is just a meaningless question. There is no answer to it because the question is meaningless.

Under those that think mathematical objects exist, there are those that think they exist as abstract objects (Platonism) or that they exist as concrete objects. If you say that they are concrete objects, they could either be physical objects or mental objects. If they are physical, that would be physicalism, where you think that numbers and other things are actual physical entities. If you think they are mental entities, then you are a Conceptualist – they exist only in the mind. If you think they exist only in the human mind, that would be a human form of Conceptualism. If you hold they exist in God's mind, that would be divine Conceptualism. We've already described Platonism and divine Conceptualism as two options.

On the other hand, suppose you say they don't exist – anti-realism. That is the Nominalist view – they aren't real; they are just useful fictions. Here there is a whole plethora of alternatives – different kinds of Nominalism that are available. Let me just highlight two of them.

First, "Fictionalism." Fictionalism says that these statements about mathematical objects and properties and so forth are literally false, but they are useful. They are like statements of fiction. For example, "Sherlock Holmes lived on Baker Street and he was a detective." That is literally false because there was no such person as Sherlock Holmes. But it is true in the story of Sherlock Holmes. So it is fictionally true, even though it is literally false. It would be fictionally false to say, "Sherlock Holmes was a mechanic that lived on Peoria Street." That would be fictionally false – he wasn't a mechanic and he didn't live on that street in the story. It would be both fictionally false and literally false. But to say he was a detective and lived on Baker Street would be fictionally true, though literally false. Similarly, Fictionalists would say about mathematical statements like " $2+2=4$ " that this is

literally false because there is no such thing as 2 and 4; they don't exist. But it is fictionally true in the sense that, given the axioms of arithmetic, it follows in the story of arithmetic that $2+2=4$.

"Figuralism" is the other view I want to highlight. It is different. Figuralists feel uncomfortable saying a statement like " $2+2=4$ " is false – you have to swallow hard to tell someone " $2+2=4$ " is a false statement.²¹ So Figuralists say that these statements are just figurative ways of speaking, but they are true. It is like someone who says "It is raining cats and dogs!" That statement is true, it is raining cats and dogs outside. But it is a metaphor. It is a metaphorical statement about how hard it is raining. So you shouldn't think that that metaphorical statement is false. It is true. But the person that takes it literally is simply misunderstanding what is being asserted. In the same way, it is true that " $2+2=4$," but that is a figurative way of speaking. When I say there are three men at the table, that is true literally. But if I say, "3 is the number of the men at the table," that is just a figurative way of speaking. I don't mean that there really is an object called "3" that exists in addition to the men.

Both of these are viable options for the Christian theologian today. I find both of them quite attractive, and I am torn about which one to go with. But my inclination is to go with *some kind* of an anti-realism of either a Fictionalist or a Figuralist sort – or, if that won't work, to fall back on Conceptualism. I think you can see that there are a number of options open to the Christian theologian today to meet the challenge of Platonism, and therefore we do not need to lose sleep over this.

DISCUSSION

Question: How would the existence of evil fit in to all of this?

Answer: That would be a different subject in that evil, if it exists, isn't an abstract object. It would bear on there being objective moral values and what you think they are. For example, cruelty and greed. Are these abstract objects in the way Plato thought? In other words, are they kind of "out there" and are existing objects? Or are they just characteristics of persons? I am inclined to the latter view for reasons quite independent of Platonism. When we talk about the goodness of God, I will offer a view according to which these moral values are grounded in God's being – the way he is. And so what contradicts that is evil. Evil is a lack of, or absence of, right order in the creaturely will. Rather than being ordered towards God as the right good, the will is ordered instead towards lesser goods, and therefore, goes something that is wrong and falls into evil.

Question: I understand the Nominalism of William of Ockham had virulent strains that affected parts of Europe and especially where Luther was and that was part of Luther's misunderstanding of Catholic theology because he admitted to being an Ockhamist. Can you say anything regarding that?

Answer: Nominalism has a very bad name in theology. But I think it is quite distinct from Nominalism in the way I have described it, as a view about abstract objects. William of Ockham was actually a Conceptualist. He held that these things have being in the mind of

²¹ 30:06

God. He was in line, I think, with the mainstream Christian position of thinking that properties and other abstract objects are in the divine mind as God's conceptions. So it is hard for me to understand what is wrong with Ockhamism in that sense. I think that he was on the right track in holding to this sort of divine Conceptualism. But Nominalism took on a kind of broader theological significance, as you say, that was quite negative and is beyond our discussion here.

Next time we will look at some application to our lives of this attribute of divine self-existence. I hope that our study of God's self-existence and necessity has served to exalt your understanding of God's being and his greatness and to expand your mind to see how truly marvelous the Lord is as the self-existent, necessary source of all being other than himself.²²

²² Total Running Time: 35:42 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 4

Infinite: Eternity

Application of Self-Existence

We have been talking about God's self-existence. I have been arguing that we should parse out the notion of God's self-existence in terms of God's metaphysical necessity, that is to say, God is a being which cannot not exist, it is impossible for God to fail to exist. God doesn't just happen to exist, rather God's existence is metaphysically necessary. And then, secondly, I said it means that everything else that exists is contingent upon God for its existence. Everything else that exists is created by God and depends upon God for its existence. So God's self-existence means he is a metaphysically necessary being upon whom everything else in existence depends for its being.

This doctrine is not just some abstract, airy-fairy theological truth. It has some important applications to our lives. Let me share two of these.²³

First, it means that God ought to be our ultimate concern in life. The theologian Paul Tillich defined God as "the object of ultimate concern." Since God is the ultimate being, the metaphysically necessary source of all other being, he is properly the object of ultimate concern because he is the ultimate being. Therefore, to substitute anything else for God is literally a form of idolatry. If I were to ask for a show of hands of how many idolaters we have in the class today, how many would raise their hands? We probably wouldn't get too many hands. But if I were to ask instead, "What is your ultimate concern in life?," I wonder how many other answers we would get than "knowing God and serving him." If there is anything else other than "knowing and serving God," then really you are falling into idolatry – you are worshipping a lesser God. God ought to be our ultimate concern in life, the very focus and center of our existence. In the most absolute sense, then, he is Lord. Everything else depends upon him, he depends upon nothing. Therefore, we need to depend upon the one who depends upon no one.

Second, God's self-existence excludes our selfishness. Another word for "self-existence" is "independence." To be self-existent is to be independent, not dependent upon anything. This is exactly what Satan and man want – independence. They want to be independent. When we go our own way and seek to live independently of God, we are in effect challenging our self-hood to God's self-existent being. We are opposing our self-hood to his self-existence, our self to God's great I AM. On the one hand, I think selfishness seems very natural. When we just think about ourselves and life, as we struggle to get through it, it seems very natural to be selfish and look out for your own self-interest. But when you contemplate God's self-existence and our dependency on God for our very next breath, for our existence moment by moment, then I think you can see how absurd it is

²³ I am indebted to my former Pastor Paul Cox for the application sections of all these lectures on God's attributes.

for creatures to raise their selfish persons against the self-existence of God, upon whom they depend moment by moment for their very being. Once you understand how radically contingent we are, how we depend upon God and his pleasure for our very existence moment by moment, then to live independently of God is madness.²⁴ Rather our whole life ought to be lived in dependence upon this person upon whom we depend on our existence moment by moment.

Job 42:1-6 describes Job's dialogue with God after seeing the tremendous vision of God in the whirlwind, the greatness of God:

Then Job answered the LORD: "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Here, Job, once he came to see the vision of the greatness of God and how all of God's purpose and will will be accomplished, comes to a position of humility and self-abasement and humbleness before God and repents in dust and ashes. That is an expression of the kind of humility that we need to have before God, this self-existent being upon whom we depend.

Those would be two applications of understanding God's self-existence: first, that God ought to be our ultimate concern in life and that, second, we can no longer live simply for self but must live for God, upon whom we depend.

DISCUSSION

Question: People like Richard Dawkins see God's forbearance and his love as God's weakness or his non-existence. But, he is, himself, dependent every moment for the air that God has given him to breathe, and it is tragic.

Answer: I think you are absolutely right. It shows the remarkable forbearance and patience of God that he would give sinners the breath to blaspheme him and that he would keep and sustain them in existence so they can continue to reject and spurn him. It is the remarkable forbearance and love of God. Again, you see how these attributes of God tie together because we will be talking about God's love later on, but you see an expression of it in God's self-existence as well.

Question: God should be our first concern. You actually see that in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says don't be concerned about what you are going to eat. If you do, you can't make the Father your concern.

Answer: Yes, very much so! Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well." So don't be concerned about them. That is absolutely right.

²⁴ 4:59

Infinite: Eternity

The next attribute of God that we want to discuss is God's eternity. Let's look at some scriptural data concerning God's being eternal.

Scriptural Data

First of all, the Bible affirms that *God exists without beginning or 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. Thou turnest man back to the dust, and sayest, "Turn back, O children of men!" For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

Here the psalmist confirms God's everlasting duration from eternity past into eternity future – God exists without beginning or end.²⁵

Also, Psalm 41:13 teaches something similar: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen." Here again you have this expression that God exists from everlasting to everlasting without beginning or end of his existence.

Secondly, *God's eternity contrasts with the transitory nature of man* and the brevity of man's temporal existence. 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 the life of man and the life of the whole universe are contrasted with God's eternal duration. They pass away; they are transitory in their existence, like yesterday when it is past. But God will endure forever.

Psalm 90:5-6 goes on to contrast the eternity of God with man's transitory nature: "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 man's existence is compared to a kind of dream that, once you wake up, vanishes. It just endures for such a brief time; it is ephemeral in its existence rather than substantial, as is God's eternal duration.

Compare Job 36:26 and Isaiah 41:4. Job says, "Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable." It is to say that God's existence is infinite; the number of his years are unsearchable; there is no finite number that you can give to the number of years that God exists. Then Isaiah says, "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 there at the beginning; he is there at the end of human history; he is the self-existent one, the one who endures forever. God's eternity contrasts with the brief

²⁵ 10:13

and ephemeral existence that we human beings have.

Thirdly, *God existed “before” time began*. There are several places in the New Testament where it speaks of God as existing before the foundations of the world; before the ages began, God existed. One example is Jude 25, which is a wonderful doxology that has some very interesting expressions with respect to God’s relationship to time: “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.” Isn’t that interesting? It gives glory, majesty, dominion, and authority to God, before all time, now (presently), and forever on into the future.²⁶ It seems to suggest that time itself is not infinite in the past; time doesn’t just go back forever. There was a beginning to time, and, in some difficult to express way, “before” time began, there is God existing alone without the universe.

Those are some of the scriptural data pertinent to God’s eternity.

DISCUSSION

Question: Years ago I looked up the definition of time in the concordance, and its definition was “the distance between the eternities.”

Answer: That is an interesting definition. Most Bible dictionaries don’t give definitions of time; they usually would reserve that for philosophical or scientific discussions. If I think I understand it right, it is saying that God existing alone without the world is eternal, and then it seems to imagine that there is this sort of eternity at the other end (the future) after human history plays itself out, perhaps after Judgment Day or something like that. So time, then, on this view is this interval between the two eternities. Although that sounds very mystical, it is expressing a view that is worth exploring. I am not so sure I like that definition because of this: it seems to me that if we take the resurrection seriously, it doesn’t teach that time comes to an end. Rather there will be a new heavens and a new Earth which will involve physical bodily existence. We will have physical resurrection bodies like Jesus’ resurrection body in which he appeared to the disciples. And of course that resurrection body is in space and time. So while this universe will certainly come to an end, it seems that if we take the doctrine of the resurrection seriously, time won’t come to an end. Time will go on forever because, unlike creation – where God creates the world –, he is not going to annihilate the world. This view seems to presuppose that there is going to be an annihilation of the world similar to the creation of the world so that everything reverts back to just God existing alone in eternity. But that is not the Christian view. The Christian view is that God has created the world and that he is not going to annihilate it. He is going to transform it. There will be a transformation of this world into a new heavens and a new Earth in which we will live forever. But thank you for sharing that very interesting definition! I never heard that before.

²⁶ 15:26

Systematic Summary

Introduction

Let's talk about a systematic summary of this biblical material concerning divine eternity. Theologians are divided over the meaning of divine eternity. Minimally, to say that God is eternal is to say that God's existence has neither beginning nor end. God is permanent. But, beyond that, the doctrine of eternity is controversial. Does the doctrine mean that God endures throughout infinite time, from infinite past to infinite future? Does God exist in time, but he exists forever throughout all time, from infinite past to the infinite future? Or does it mean that God transcends time altogether?²⁷ That is to say, God exists timelessly. He is not in time at all; he is outside of time.

Those are two different views of divine eternity that are radically distinct from each other. The Bible, for better or worse, is not clear on whether God is timeless or everlasting. Certainly some of the biblical data seem to speak of God as everlasting. Remember we read in the Psalms: "from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." God is he who was, and is, and is to come. Those are temporal, tensed verbs and seem to suggest that God does exist in time. He has existed forever, and he will exist forever.

But on the other hand, when you come to these passages that talk about God's existing before time, like Jude 25, there you have the idea that time itself is not infinite. Time itself is not beginningless; time itself was created by God. And in order to create time, God would have to be outside time. He would have to be timeless.

This is an issue which really cannot be decided biblically. It is one that has to be decided or explored philosophically, as we look at the arguments for and against divine timelessness.

In order to address this question, we have to grapple with the even more fundamental question, "What is time?" One student on his philosophy exam answered that question by saying, "*Time* is a weekly news magazine." At one level that is true; but we want to understand what time is as that dimension in which we live and experience life. Even the great theologian, St. Augustine, confessed that he found himself confronted with a dilemma that we all can identify with. Augustine said, "When no one asks me what time is, then, of course, I know what it is. But as soon as someone asks me for a definition, then I do not know what time is." It is very difficult to define time in any sort of non-circular way.

As a working definition, we can define time by saying that it is a duration involving an earlier and later. Time is a kind of dimension of reality whose elements are ordered by the relations *earlier than* and *later than*. As such, time is distinct from space. Space is also a kind of interval, but the points of space are not ordered by the relations *earlier than* and *later than*. Points of space have nothing comparable to this *earlier than/later than* relation among its points. It is this relation that orders the moments of time which seems to make time distinctive, to make time what it is. Its elements are related by earlier and later relations.

The question is: does God experience past, present, and future – are the moments of his

²⁷ 20:01

life related by *earlier than/later than* relations? Does God have a present in which he exists and a past which he remembers – “Yes, I did those things; yes, I remember those things.” Does he have a future which he foreknows? “I know that I will do these things. I know what will happen in the future. So I can give revelatory knowledge to prophets to tell human beings what will happen in the future because I know what will happen in the future.” Does God have a past, present, and future? Or does God simply exist outside of time, so that he has no past, present, and future? He just exists timelessly, and the past, present, and future are what we experience and live in, who are denizens of the world of time and space. That is the question before us.²⁸

DISCUSSION

Question: On the issue of whether God exists inside and outside of time, has anyone ever proposed the idea that God exists in both, as if I filled up a sink full of water, and I stuck my hand in it, and I would be both wet and dry.

Answer: This is an excellent question, and certainly people have proposed that. But the difficulty with that view is that *timeless* and *temporal* are contradictories to each other. The way that you define “timeless” is to say something is not temporal. If God is timeless, then he is atemporal. So to say God is both timeless and temporal is to utter a self-contradiction, unless you can provide some kind of a model for it. For example, some things can be both black and white, if it is black on one side and white on the other side. So there you provided a model. Or you could say that something is black at one moment, but it is white at another moment, as a marshmallow is originally white, but after it is roasted in a fire, it turns black. The marshmallow is both black and white but at different moments in time. If you want to say that God is both timeless and temporal, you have got to qualify it in some way in order to avoid a self contradiction.

The difficulty with your analogy of the hand in the sink is that God doesn’t have physical parts, so you can’t say that God is timeless in one part but temporal in another part. God doesn’t have any parts; he is not a physical object, so that won’t work. Could you say he is timeless at one time, and temporal at another time? That won’t work; that is self contradictory – to say he is timeless *at one time*. The intuition behind this is a good one – to ask if we can combine these in some way –, but to do that, you have to come up with some kind of a model, some kind of qualification to avoid a contradiction. In fact, that is what I am going to try to do later on; but for now let’s just see if we can look at arguments for and against divine timelessness.

Question: Are we limiting the answer to that which we can understand? You are saying either-or but couldn’t there be a third alternative that is beyond our understanding?

Answer: The answer to that is the answer I just gave to the previous question, namely, theology does nothing to exalt God by affirming contradictions. To say of God that “A” is both true and not true does not exalt God. That is just to utter nonsense. What we want to do, if we believe that God is rational, is find some sort of an understanding that is consistent. That isn’t to say we can understand everything about God. Certainly God

²⁸ 24:52

remains beyond our comprehension, but we have got to do better than just utter self-contradictions about God; otherwise, that is like saying that God both exists and does not exist. It is just nonsense.

Question: Is it possible that different persons of the Trinity relate to time differently? For example, Jesus Christ was and still is a human being, so can he relate to time differently than the other persons of the Trinity?

Answer: We certainly could say that Christ, in his human nature, is temporal. And maybe you can say in his divine nature he is atemporal. That might be a way to try to do this. But then the question is going to be, how do you get these two together? You are back to the same problem again – how do you unite a divine nature that is atemporal with a human nature that is temporal? I do not think you can say that Christ's divine nature is temporal, but that the Father and the Holy Spirit are atemporal, because then you split the Godhead in three pieces – somehow you pulled God apart and destroyed the unity of God, if there is a part of God that is temporal and another part of that is atemporal. While I think you can do it with the divinity and humanity of Christ, I don't think you can do it with just the divine nature.

What we will do next time is to begin to look at some arguments as to why we ought to think that God is timeless and we will look at some arguments to think that God is temporal. Then, on the basis of those arguments, we will attempt to draft a coherent understanding of God's eternity and God's relationship to time.²⁹

²⁹ Total Running Time: 31:12 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 5

God's Eternity and His Relationship to Time

Argument for God's Timelessness

We have been talking about divine eternity, and last time, after surveying the scriptural data, we began to try to make sense of it. We saw that while the Scripture teaches clearly that God is without beginning and without end, that he exists permanently, that he never came into being and never will go out of being, nevertheless it is not clear as to whether we should understand God as existing timelessly, that is to say, outside of time, or whether we should think of God as existing everlastingly throughout time. Does God have a past, a present, and a future, which extend into the infinite past and into the infinite future, or does God have no past, present, and future at all? Is he simply beyond the dimension of time? We pointed out in response to questions last week that these are contradictories to each other. To say that God exists timelessly is simply to say he does not exist in time. So it is not a both/and proposition, unless you can find some way of qualifying this, because these are contradictory with each other. Either he exists timelessly or he exists temporally, and the question is, how should we best understand this?

In order to settle this question, we want to look at some arguments for divine timelessness and divine temporality. Let's first talk about an argument for divine timelessness.

In my book *Time and Eternity* I survey what I think are the best, or most promising, arguments for divine timelessness, and I find that most of these are, frankly, very implausible or weak arguments, with the exception of one. This is the argument based on the incompleteness of temporal life. The idea here is that a temporal mode of existence is, by its very nature, a defective mode of existence. One has only the brief, fleeting present. The future is not yet – one does not yet possess one's future. The past is gone, irretrievably lost. So all one has is one's present, and that is ever changing, ever passing away, with no permanence, so that a temporal being cannot possess his life all at once. By contrast, a being which is timeless, outside of time, possesses all of its life at once. It simply has no past, present, or future – it just has a timelessly existing state. It has its life all at once. The claim is that this is a more perfect mode of existence, and, since God is the most perfect being, it would be incompatible with God to have a defective mode of existence. Therefore, God cannot exist temporally.

The defective nature of temporal life was brought home to me very powerfully a number of years ago when our children were small and I was reading to them after dinner one evening. We were reading Laura Ingalls Wilder's book, *Little House In The Big Woods*, and as we came to the end of that book, I came to the following passage, which for me, who was studying the doctrine of divine eternity and time, was just shattering (though it didn't have the same impact on my children!). This passage just spoke volumes. This is how the book ends,

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.³⁰

What is so poignant about that passage, of course, is that that time, which for Laura Ingalls Wilder was so real and so present, now *is* long ago! Ma and Pa are *gone*. The American frontier which they struggled to win is *gone*. Laura Ingalls Wilder herself is *gone*. Time has a savage way of gnawing away at existence, claiming everything that exists, and taking it into the past where it is irretrievably lost, gone forever, never to be reclaimed.³¹

The argument here is that such a defective mode of existence is surely incompatible with the existence of a perfect being. Therefore, a perfect being cannot exist temporally but must exist timelessly.

I don't think that this is a knock-down argument for divine timelessness, but I do think it appeals to very powerful intuitions about the transitoriness and ephemerality of temporal life. Therefore, in the absence of any counter-balancing arguments for divine temporality, I think this can justifiably motivate a doctrine of divine timelessness.

Argument for God's Being Everlasting

However, it does seem that there are also good arguments on the other side. Let me look first at the argument for God's being everlasting based on his changing relations with the world. God is a God who acts in history. He is causally related to events in time – first

³⁰ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods* (New York: Harper & Row, 1932), pp. 237-238.

³¹ 6:19

causing one event, then causing another event after that, then causing another. God is intimately involved in the temporal process. He parts the Red Sea, he calls the children of Israel out of Egypt, he sends Christ into the world. The incarnation of the second person of the Trinity is an especially problematic doctrine for those who think that God is timeless. Here God himself enters into human history in the person of Jesus Christ. It seems self-evident that there was a time before which the second person of the Trinity had a human nature. There was a time when the second person of the Trinity was not yet incarnate, and there was a time after which the second person of the Trinity was intimately united to a human nature. It would seem from God's changing relations with the world that he would have to be in time. Anything that changes has a before and an after. That just is to be in time.

Let me throw in one other argument for divine temporality. I think this is easy to understand and also very powerful. This would be an argument based upon God's omniscience. As an omniscient being, God must know all truths – he must know all the facts that there are. But there are clearly truths which are tensed truths. Sentences are not in just in tenseless modes; they have tense to them– future tense, past tense, present tense, and other tenses. God must know these tensed truths if he is truly omniscient. For example, God must know that Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492. But at one time, that wasn't true. In 1490, it was true that Christopher Columbus *will* discover America, and God must have known that truth. But if God knows these tensed truths, then that means that his knowledge is constantly changing, as future-tense truths become false and the present-tense versions becomes true. "Christopher Columbus *will* discover America" was true at one time, then it became false, and it became true that "Christopher Columbus *is* discovering America." Then that became false and the past-tense statement "Christopher Columbus *did* discover America" became true.³² So God's knowledge would be constantly changing, and therefore he would be in time.

It seems that both of these arguments, the argument from God's changing relations, and the argument from God's knowledge of constantly changing tensed truths, provide very powerful arguments for God's being in time.

Evaluation of the Arguments

How should we evaluate these arguments? How we evaluate these arguments is largely going to depend upon our view of time. How you construe God's eternity will stand or fall with your understanding of the nature of time. Philosophers have distinguished two views of time which are often conveniently called the A-Theory and the B-Theory. Those initials do not stand for anything; they are just a handy way of categorizing them. Sometimes the A-Theory of time is called the "tensed theory" or "dynamic theory," and the B-Theory of time is called the "tenseless theory" or "static theory."

What are these theories of time? According to the A-Theory of time, events are ordered as past, present, and future. The only thing that really exists is the present moment. The future is just potential; it does not yet exist. It hasn't come into being. The past no longer exists – it once did exist, but it has now passed away. There is an objective difference between the past, present, and the future in terms of their reality. Things in the future and

³² 10:23

the past are not real; only things in the present are real. On this view, temporal becoming is a real and objective feature of the world. Things come into being, and they go out of being. Temporal becoming is a real and objective feature of the world.

By contrast, the B-Theory of time says that the difference between past, present, and future is just a subjective illusion of human consciousness. In fact, all events in time – whether past, present, or future – are equally real. There is no objective difference between the past, the present, and the future. It is just a matter of your subjective viewpoint. For the people in 2008, the events of 2008 are present, and the events of 2050 are future. But for the people in 2050, who are just as real as we are, the events of 2050 are real and present, but the events of 2008 are past. What is past or present or future on this view is just a matter of your subjective perspective. In reality, everything is equally real, whether past, present, or future, and temporal becoming is just an illusion of human consciousness. So we are victims in a sense of a massive illusion on the B-Theory of time, insofar as we think that things really come to exist and cease to exist. Really, things don't come into being or cease to be. They all exist at their respective stations on the time line, and they are all equally real and there. We just have the illusion that we are moving along the time line, when in fact we are not. There is no dynamic nature to this picture at all. The notion of moving time or becoming is just illusory.

Whether you think that God is timeless or temporal will stand or fall on whether you adopt an A-Theory of time or a B-Theory of time.³³ If you believe in the existence of God on the A-Theory of time, then God cannot be equally present to the past and the future because those things don't exist. They are simply unreal. What he is related to causally is the present event. He is causing the present events to exist, and he conserves them in being, and tomorrow he will cause different events to occur and sustain them in being, and so on and so forth. But the only events that God is causally related to are the present events. Moreover, as explained earlier, on the A-Theory there are these tensed truths that are constantly changing. God knows that the 2008 election is currently taking place. He knows that the 1980 election is already over and that the election in 2012 has not yet occurred (if we are now living in 2008). So on the A-Theory, you have got to say that God exists in time because of his changing relations with the world and his knowledge of tensed facts.

By contrast, if you adopt the B-Theory of time, then it is very easy to see how God could exist outside of time and be causally related to every event in time because they are all equally real. From his eternal, timeless standpoint, his causing the parting of the Red Sea, his causing the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, his causing the second coming of Christ, everything is equally real, and God outside of time simply sustains them all in being. There is no temporal becoming; there is no change in that sense.

Moreover, on the B-Theory, there are no tensed truths. We may have tensed sentences, but our English sentences which are tensed are just our subjective ways of expressing what are, in fact, really tenseless truths. For example, "In 1492 Columbus *discovers* America" – the verb there "discovers" isn't present tense, it's just tenseless. Our tensed sentences express tenseless truths. Another example would be that the truth that "Hillary Clinton lost the primary" could be expressed by saying, "Hillary Clinton *loses* the 2008

³³ 15:01

primary,” and that is a tenseless sentence. The tense of the verb is just an illusion. An analogy would be the difference between “here” and “there.” On the B-Theory, to say that something is occurring “now” is kind of like saying it is occurring “here.” There is no objective place called “here.” For someone sitting in room A, that room A is “here.” For someone sitting in room B, that room “B” is “here,” and room A would be “there.” But for that person in room A, room B would be “there.” There isn’t any objective place in the world called “here;” that is just a subjective viewpoint. Similarly, with regard to the concept of “now,” there is no “now” on this view – it is just an illusion of your personal consciousness. On this view, there are no tensed truths for God to know. All God knows are all these tenseless facts about what occurs at certain dates and times.

How do you decide between these two views? If your view of God’s eternity is going to stand or fall on whether you adopt the A-Theory or B-Theory, how should you decide? Everybody in this debate admits that the A-Theory is the common sense view of time. The average person thinks that there is a difference between past, present, and future and that things do come into existence and do go out of existence. Everybody, even B-Theorist, acknowledges that the common-sense view of time is the A-Theory. The A-Theory is deeply rooted in our experience of temporal becoming. We not only experience temporal becoming in the world around us, as we see change in flux all around us; but even in the interior world of consciousness, we experience the becoming of mental events. We experience a stream of consciousness of one thought occurring after another – a stream of consciousness that is wholly independent of the external world. There is nothing that could be more intimate to us than the experience of temporal becoming.³⁴ Even our experience of the external world cannot be compared to the intimacy and the clarity of our experience of temporal becoming because we experience not only the becoming of the external world, but even the interior world of the life of the mind, as we experience a stream of consciousness.

So the B-Theorist would have to give us very powerful reasons for abandoning this common sense view of time and denying our intimate experience of temporal becoming and tense. I would simply say that my reasoned judgment is that there is no good reason to deny that experience. If you are interested in pursuing this further, take a look at my book *Time and Eternity*, where in a couple of chapters I look at the principal arguments for and against the A-Theory and for and against the B-Theory. I do not think there are any good reasons for thinking that our experience of temporal reality is illusory and so should be denied. So philosophically I do not see any good reason to adopt a B-Theory.

Moreover, the B-Theory is theologically objectionable on a number of grounds. I think there are problems with it theologically. For one thing, it emasculates the Christian doctrine of creation. I take it to be essential to the Christian doctrine of creation that there is a state of affairs in the actual world which consists of God alone, without the universe, and that he then brings the universe into being. But on the B-Theory that is false. On the B-Theory, God never brings the universe into existence, since temporal becoming is illusory. Rather God just exists timelessly, and the universe exists co-eternally with God. The difference between God and the universe is that the universe has an internal dimension called time, which structures the events as earlier and later. But viewed from

³⁴ 20:00

an external standpoint, the universe exists just as timelessly as God – it is just there with God. God never actually brings the universe into being. This seems to emasculate the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing, which surely does teach that God existed alone and brought the universe into being.

Moreover, think of the problem of evil on the B-Theory of time and what implications this has. What it means, for example, is that all the evil and the sin in the world is never really done away with. The stain of evil is still indelibly there. Someday Christ will come again, and thereafter there will be no more evil. But all the evil that existed previously never ceases to exist. It is never really annihilated; indeed, in one sense, Christ still hangs on the cross on this view. Granted, thereafter, there is his resurrection, but the event of the crucifixion is just as real as the event of the resurrection. Christ is timelessly on the cross in this view, which is surely theologically very problematic. I think we want to say that evil will be vanquished, that it will be done away with, and God will say, “Thank goodness, that’s over!,” so to speak. So we have no good reason philosophically for adopting the B-Theory, and we have good theological reasons for opposing the B-Theory. Therefore, I cast my lot with the A-Theory of time.

A Proposal

How should we understand God’s eternity, then? Here I want to make a proposal. Here is a view that I think can unite both of the arguments that we’ve seen so far. I want to suggest that we understand God’s eternity to mean that God is timeless without creation, and he is temporal subsequent to the moment of creation. God is timeless without creation. Existing alone without the universe, God exists timelessly. With the creation of the world, time begins and God enters into time in virtue of his changing relationships with the temporal world and his knowledge of tensed truths.

In a sense, I have come back to the model that someone suggested earlier, when it was asked why couldn’t God be both? I said, “Not both unless you qualify it.” But I think we can qualify it. God is timeless without creation, and he is temporal with creation. That makes sense of the passage in Jude, which says, “. . . before all time and now and forever.” That is a way of expressing in ordinary language God’s existing timelessly without creation, time begins at creation, and God now and forever exists in time.³⁵

DISCUSSION

Question: I am not convinced that because God interacts in time that he is bound by time. Let me give a spatial example as an analogy. If you think of a piece of paper on the table, that is two-dimensional. I can be above that paper and write things on the paper such that the two-dimensions is changed, yet I am in the third dimension – I am not bound in the two-dimensional space. In the same way, why can’t God be considered unbound to time?

Answer: You can make sense of that on the B-Theory because what this does is make time a spatial dimension. It is all strung out there in front of you. So the being in the higher dimension can interact with anything on that surface. But that just is to presuppose

³⁵ 25:32

that time is just a B-Theory, where things in time are all equally existent. So the being that is outside of time can interact with them. That analogy really does illustrate well the B-Theory of time. You could say, “But wait a minute, isn’t the pencil moving, and doesn’t that imply time as well?” Right, that would mean God doesn’t exist timelessly. That would make God exist in a kind of hyper-time, a second time dimension, which doesn’t gain you anything. You only moved him from our time dimension to a higher time dimension. I think that analogy really does support what I said – it is going to mean that you have to be a B-Theorist.

Question: The A-Theory indicates that God exists in time, but when God created the universe, he created time for his creatures to dwell inside of. It seems like he could look down upon time and see and recognize current time as it goes along the time line but still be above time or be timeless.

Answer: It seems that what this is trying to do is combine the A-Theory and B-Theory into a kind of A-B-Theory, a quasi-theory. What this would say is that past, present, and future are all equally real, but the present kind of moves along the time line, like a spotlight moving along a row of pilings or something. This is the way the “now” moves across the time line. I talk about this in the book. I think that really is incoherent in the end, unless you posit a higher time dimension, because if the “now” really is moving across the time line, then there is a second time dimension in which the “now” is moving. The “now” is at every moment in the time line, right? It goes across all of them. If you say first it is here, then it is here, then it is here, you posit a second time dimension in which the lapse of the first dimension is taking place. That really doesn’t get you anywhere. It means God would have to be either in the hyper-time dimension, in which case he is still temporal, or if he is not, he can’t know what time the moving “now” is on. If he knows the moving “now” is now at 2008, then he has temporally located himself. He can only know that the moving “now” is at every point in the time line, unless you introduce this second time dimension.³⁶

Question: I am definitely entrenched in the B-Theory or something like what you just described. Because God is described as the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. “All of my days are numbered before there is even one of them.” My days are written in his book already. Would this be fair to say? If he knows I am going to die when I’m 86, he will also know every prayer that I am going to pray and every response he will have to that. From God’s standpoint, that is done. God to me is outside of this time line that moves along.

Answer: What this question does is tie the discussion of divine eternity very nicely with the discussion of God’s omniscience, which we will get to. You did! It was a beautiful segue! When we talk about God’s foreknowledge of the future, we have to agree, as biblical Christians, that God knows when we are going to die. He knows the prayers that we will pray; he knows the answers he will give. I entirely agree! The question, however, is: does God know these things because they exist out there and he timelessly sees them and so he knows what is going to happen, or is it that God knows what will happen in the future, but it is not because he looks and sees that it is already done? It is because he knows that this is the way that you will freely act, and he will act in response in a certain

³⁶ 30:21

way. These are not the same view; these are two quite different views of God's knowledge of the future.

Question: I am undecided as to which theory I really believe in, but I do think that God cannot exist temporally, because if he was bound by time when he is interacting with the world through his miracles, he would be bound by something that is really set into the laws of science and nature. But God should be able to circumvent these laws – and I think he can because he is outside of that realm, outside those laws. As soon as he enters that temporal state, he would be bound by time and would not be able to circumvent those laws.

Answer: Let me say a couple of things in response. I certainly think we want to say that God isn't bound by scientific laws. He could have created a universe operating according to totally different laws. But when we are talking about his relationship to time, this is not a matter of scientific law. This is more of metaphysics. It is not physics. So it really doesn't have anything to do with God's being bound by science.

The question here is this: is it true that having a temporal mode of existence is binding oneself in the way you describe? Is it limiting oneself? I am not sure if that language isn't emotionally loaded. In one sense, becoming temporal is a way of liberating oneself, liberating oneself to act and to react, to have intercourse with other persons, to be responsive and active. A timeless being is a being that is frozen into immobility, that cannot change in any way, lest a before and after should exist. So in some ways I think this is an emotional matter. In some ways you can think of God's entering into time as God's bursting out into this tremendous activity in creating a world and interacting with it and so forth.

One more thing – I would say this: a way of thinking of this is as an act of condescension on God's part. In creating a temporal world, God condescends to give up his mode of atemporal existence and to take on our mode of temporal existence for our sake and our salvation. Then in the incarnation, he condescends even further to take on not merely our mode of existence but our very humanity. I think that is very characteristic of the biblical God – a God who humbles himself and condescends to take on our mode of existence and our humanity.

So let me just say that these are controversial issues. As I said, this is not a biblical issue on which one goes to the wall, and so you are entirely at liberty to disagree with what I present here without being unbiblical in anyway. I am not presenting this as biblical truth, but as my best effort to make sense of biblical truth that God is eternal.³⁷

³⁷ Total Running Time: 37:49 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 6

Questions on God's Relationship to Time

Summation

We have been talking about God's eternity and his relationship to time. In the last session we looked at arguments for divine timelessness, and I said really about the only good argument there is is the argument from incompleteness of temporal life. That does provide a motivation for a doctrine of divine timelessness, if there weren't counter arguments on the other side. But I did present two arguments that I think are countervailing, namely, the argument based upon God's real relation to a temporal world and then the argument based on God's knowledge of tensed facts. Both of these would seem to require that God be in time.

By way of evaluating these arguments, I said it really is going to depend on what theory of time you adopt. Do you think that tense, that is, that feature of reality that has to do with what is "now" or "present" as opposed to "past" and "future," is an objective feature of reality or do you think that is just an illusion of human consciousness? Do you think temporal becoming is real, that things really do come into being and go out of being, or do you think that temporal becoming is just an illusion of human consciousness – that things in the past, present, and future are all equally real and that there is really no temporal becoming? My argument was that if you adopt the view that says tense and temporal becoming are an objective feature of the world, independent of human experience, then that gives you good grounds for thinking that God must know tensed facts and therefore must be temporally located. Also in virtue of his changing relationships with a world that is dynamic and undergoing becoming, God would be temporal as well. So it seems that, given the so-called A-Theory of time, we have good grounds for thinking that God is in fact temporal.

That leads to a problem. Since time had a beginning and God didn't have a beginning, how are we to understand God's relationship to time? The proposal that I suggested was that we think of God as being timeless without creation and temporal from the moment of creation on. That is to say, God existing alone without the world, creating nothing, is timeless. But with the decision to create a temporal world, God condescends to abandon timelessness to enter into time in virtue of his real relationship with the temporal world. Therefore, God is in time from the moment of creation onward.

DISCUSSION

Question: After creation you say God is temporal. To me that would imply the present and the past exist, but you would have to say the future does not yet exist.

Answer: There are different views on that. Some people would say what you said – that

the past and the present both exist, so that the people back there in the year 2000 are just as real as we are. Or the people in 2000 B.C. are just as real as we are. But there aren't any people in the future – they are unreal. That is one view. But I do not think that this is a good view. I think that runs into the same problems that a pure B-Theory has. My preferred view would be to say that only what exists presently is real. The things in the past have ceased to exist, things in the future haven't yet existed, so the only thing that actually exists is that which exists presently. That is a pure A-Theory of time. Very often this view of time is called "presentism." Presentism is the view that the only temporal items that exist are things that exist presently.

Question: Would you define "real?" You keep using the word "real," but what do you mean? Do you mean real "now?"³⁸

Answer: I don't mean real "now." That would be to say that anything real is present. But obviously, even B-Theorists agree that the past isn't present; that would be a contradiction. What I mean by "real" is that the thing actually exists independently of our knowledge of it, our experience of it, independently of our minds. Certain things do not exist in a mind-independent way – ideas, for example. You might say that the idea of Bugs Bunny exists – people have that idea. But that idea isn't mind-independent. If there weren't any minds, it wouldn't be there. Is the past like that? Do dinosaurs and things in the past actually exist? I want to say, no, they actually existed (past tense), they once were real, but they now are no longer real.

Question: Are we saying that history is not "real" because we were not there?

Answer: I am not contrasting "real" with "illusory." Certainly the past is real in the sense that it was not an illusion. But the things in the past do not exist anymore. They once existed, but they do not exist anymore. They have ceased to be. On the so-called B-Theory of time, however, that is not the case. On a B-Theory of time, the things that existed at earlier times are just as real as the things that exist in 2008 or 3008. On this view, there just isn't any becoming; things don't come into existence; they don't go out of existence. Things just exist at the various points in time at which they are located. By contrast, on presentism, only the present exists. When I say these other things earlier and later than the present aren't real, what I mean is that they do not exist. The things that exist exist presently, and these other things do not exist. That is what it means to say they are "not real."

Question: How do Kant's ideas come into this? Are you saying that in the B-Theory it is as though all times exist simultaneously and it's just a matter of human perception. . . .

Answer: We have to be careful here! It is not the case on the B-Theory that all times exist simultaneously. That would be to say that they all exist at the same time, which they obviously do not. These are different times. But they all exist equally. They are all equally real. They all exist – whereas on the A-Theory they are not all equally real. Kant was an 18th century German philosopher who believed that time and space are the products of human consciousness. He was a total anti-realist about time and space. He didn't even think that the present was real! He thought that time and space are categories or forms that the human mind imposes on reality. This is a wild view, and I do not know

³⁸ 5:19

anyone that really believes this today, anyone who thinks that the Jurassic Age never really existed but was a product of human consciousness. That was Kant's view; he was a subjectivist in that sense – he thought that the human mind structures reality to make it seem as if things are in time and space.³⁹

Question: Would anyone adhere to the B-Theory of time today?

Answer: The B-Theory of time is very popular today, especially among physicists and philosophers of science. The reason is that the way General Relativity and Special Relativity are typically discussed in science is in terms of a tenseless, four-dimensional geometry. The three dimensions of space and the one dimension of time form a kind of four-dimensional geometrical object called spacetime. Therefore, many physicists and philosophers of science – I think uncritically – assume that this construct of spacetime, this four-dimensional, geometrical object, actually exists. They read this spacetime notion as being a literal description of reality. The B-Theory is very popular today because of that.

Question: (inaudible)

Answer: That's a good question. The only people who take time travel seriously, as a real possibility, are the B-Theorists. Why? Because the future actually exists and the past actually exists. So you can go there! But on the A-Theory, there isn't any such thing as the past or the future. So you almost inevitably find that the proponents or the enthusiasts for time travel are B-Theorists. That doesn't mean that if you are a B-Theorist you have to believe in the possibility of time travel, but it does seem that the B-Theory is a necessary condition of time travel's being possible, and it certainly is the case that all of the time travel enthusiasts today are B-Theorists.

Question: How are we to reconcile relativity to the A-Theory of time?

Answer: This is a really good question! In fact, there are three physical interpretations of the equations of relativity theory. There was Einstein's original interpretation, then there was Hermann Minkowski's four-dimensional, spacetime interpretation, and then there was the Dutch physicist H. A. Lorentz's interpretation. These three physical interpretations of the mathematical core of relativity theory are empirically equivalent. That is to say, they all explain the physical experiments. But they differ very radically in their understanding of the nature of reality. The four-dimensional spacetime interpretation is actually due to Hermann Minkowski, who proposed this in 1908. Einstein's original formulation of special relativity in 1905 was actually using the traditional concepts of time and space. Time is separate from space – it is not united into one geometrical object called spacetime. Similarly, Lorentz's theory doesn't presuppose a geometrical interpretation. What happened was that Minkowski's view came to be this sort of “orthodox” interpretation of relativity theory, and Einstein himself, as soon as he heard it, abandoned his original interpretation and adopted Minkowski's because it is so much easier to work with. It provides a very easy framework for understanding relativity theory and the relation of things in space and time. But what the original Einstein interpretation or Lorentz's interpretation would say about Minkowski's four-dimensional geometry is that this is just a diagram. It is not a picture of the way reality really is. In the same way,

³⁹ 10:54

you can construct a continuum that is formed of temperature and pressure, and you can have something that could plot a thing's shape in this temperature-pressure continuum. You can do that with spacetime as well. But nobody would take seriously that there is such a thing as temperature-pressure. It is just a diagrammatic device for understanding two physical realities that are in nature quite distinct.⁴⁰

Question: How would you reconcile the empirical evidence that you can stand there and I could run across the room and for you it would be 1 second and for me less than 1 second? We started at the same point in time, but you are now at a different point in time along that continuum than I would be.

Answer: That issue is neutral between these three interpretations. All three of these interpretations predict those same results. If you are interested in how this works out, take a look at my book *Time and Eternity*, where this is discussed. But what we are talking about here is the difference between the A-Theory and the B-Theory of time. Two of the interpretations of relativity theory, the original Einstein interpretation and Lorentz's interpretation, are consistent with the A-Theory. It is only Minkowski's view that requires the B-Theory approach. These are all empirically equivalent, so there is nothing in relativity theory that says you have to be a B-Theorist and think that time is tenseless and that becoming is an illusion.

Question: If we were able to take something and move it through time, what theological implications might that have?

Answer: You need to be careful in the way you word that question. We move things through time all the time! All you have to do is just stand still, and you move through time. This object endures from a moment ago to the present. So things in that sense endure through time all the time. But what you are talking about is if we were able to go back in time or leap into the future in a way that would not involve enduring through time. What would be the theological implications of that? I am not really sure. Are you thinking of something specifically?

Followup: (inaudible) Would people abandon their faith because of it?

Answer: I don't see the relevance of time travel to the belief in God. Let me say this with respect to tampering with history via time travel. The literature on time travel is very, very similar to the literature on divine foreknowledge of the future. This is because they involve parallel problems. For example, if Jesus predicts Judas' betrayal, then when the time comes, does Judas have the freedom not to betray Christ? Yes, he has that freedom. Judas doesn't have to do it; he is not fated to betray Jesus just because Jesus predicted it. Judas could have done otherwise. But in that case Judas had the ability to do something which is such that, if he had done it, then either Jesus' prediction was wrong or else Jesus would not have made that prediction.⁴¹ Since Jesus is the Son of God, he can't be wrong. So what that means is that Judas has the ability to do something which is such that, if he were to do it, then the past would have been different. Jesus would never have made this prediction. So up until the time of his betrayal, Judas had the ability to do something such that, if he were to do it, something that happened in the past would not have happened.

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⁴¹ 21:10

That is exactly like time travel. The time traveler has the ability to pull the levers on his machine to do certain things such that, if he were to do them, then he can go back into the past and the past would have been different. We know he won't do that because the past has already occurred. We know that he *won't* do those things; but he *could* do those things. If he were to do them, then the past would have been different. Divine foreknowledge is very parallel to the idea of time travel.

There are actually great theological lessons to be learned from reading the time travel literature in terms of understanding God's providence over human history. God knows what we will do, and so he is able to predict these things in advance, but in such a way as not to abrogate our freedom. Similarly, if there were time travel, then God knows what the time traveler will do, and so he won't make any sort of mistake. It is not as though the time traveler could somehow fool God and go back in time and change things, so that God was wrong. Given divine foreknowledge, he knows exactly what the time traveler will do; he will know that the time traveler did go back in time and, say, help the Egyptians build the pyramids, and he knows that the pyramids aren't going to disappear because the time traveler will change his mind and decide not to go back. God knows all this; it is all under his providential direction.

Question: What about life-extension science? If we were able to extend life 50 years or 100 years, I believe a lot of people will begin to fall away from the faith because they will begin to think that God is not really in control. It could turn out that people begin to think they are God.

Answer: That may be. That is a different issue than what we are talking about. There you are just talking about advancements in medicine and biology that would enable us to forestall the death of cells and live longer. I agree with you entirely that there is no reason to think that this isn't due to God-given potentialities in human minds.

Question: If God is temporal, what can we say about his transcendence? Is God subject to aging?

Answer: God would not be subject to aging. To say that he is temporal does not mean he is subject to the laws of nature, so that he would grow weary or weaker or impotent or senile or anything like that. It would mean that the entire process of human history is under his direction and control. It would mean that he is actually involved in it as it unfolds. He is actually doing it. One nice illustration of the difference of the A-Theory and the B-Theory would be the difference between a live play versus a movie film as it lies in the can with a frame of action on every instance of the film. Nothing is really happening on the film. It is really all just frozen there in the can. The A-Theory is more like seeing a play actually being performed on the stage; it is actually happening. There you can imagine the director is actually involved in seeing it happen, rather than like the person who is responsible for having the film in the can. Both of them would involve providence, but the A-Theory would be a much more active and on-going process.⁴² I think of God's transcendence as being, first of all, that he set up the whole thing, that it was his decision to create time and space and to enter into them. He didn't have to. And that having done so, he now controls the course of human history to reach its eventual

⁴² 26:01

end and goal.

Question: (inaudible – something about being trapped or bound in time) At the end of this age, when God creates a new heaven and new Earth, how does he get outside of time to re-create these new things?

Answer: He would not need to get outside of time, but he could create new laws of nature and new laws of physics, so that clocks would run differently and so forth. But clearly the new heavens and the new Earth will be temporal because we will have resurrection bodies. A resurrection body that isn't temporal would be frozen, like an ice statue or a mannequin in a store window. It wouldn't do anything. That is contrary to the very nature of a dynamic, active resurrection body. There will clearly be time. That is why I take literally what the Bible says, "He has given us *everlasting* life." It will go on forever into eternity, into the future. But this language of being trapped or bound – it seems to me this is very emotionally laden language. In one sense, an individual who is timeless is trapped or bound because he can't do anything. He is frozen in immobility, and the minute he does anything he becomes temporal. So I think the language of "bound" is emotionally loaded. I would see God's temporal status as being God's sovereign choice. He could have chosen to remain atemporal by not creating anything temporal, and he would have been perfect and fulfilled in the intra-Trinitarian relationships. But he willed to condescend to create a world of temporal creatures like ourselves and to be in relationship with those creatures. That was his sovereign decision. In one sense, in creation God condescends to take on our mode of existence to have a relationship with us. Then in the Incarnation, he condescends even further to take on, not simply our mode of existence, but our very human nature – our very humanity – for our sake and our salvation. I see this as fitting with the character of this self-giving God who humbles himself in that way for the sake of the creatures he loves.

Question: Is the A-Theory more of a theory that is associated with free will and the B-Theory with predestination or even a deistic clock-maker theory?

Answer: Some people have tried to make that association. Some people have said that on the B-Theory everything is determined because it is already there. The future, everything you are going to do, is already there, it already exists. They have said that on the B-Theory there really isn't any freedom. But on the A-Theory, those things are unreal, they have yet to be created. You get to make those decisions. I don't buy that argument though. Here I want to come to the B-Theorist's defense. The B-Theory is compatible with free will because a decision that is, say, made in 3008 is not causally determined by events prior to it in, say, the year 3000. It can be causally indeterminate with respect to those events. Imagine the event is the decay of a subatomic particle that is completely indeterminate causally. Just because it exists doesn't mean that it has causal antecedents that determine it. This is consistent with saying that there are free-will decisions, causally undetermined events. But they are just scattered throughout this four-dimensional, spacetime continuum. Although a lot of people have tried to make the association between the B-Theory and determinism, or fatalism, I am not convinced that that really goes through. That wouldn't be a reason I would give for rejecting the B-theory.

Question: In order for the B-Theory to incorporate free will, would each individual point on the time line would have to branch off?

Answer: You can make a different diagram of the future that would involve branching where there would be free decisions at these various nodes. But, on the B-Theory, there is only one path through time that is the real world. The other ones are just causally potential paths that the universe could have taken, and so they are not real. Those are just possibilities that are causally possible. Those other branches are in no way real; the only thing that is real is the actual branch or the actual path through the branching structure that is made, and that is this four-dimensional continuum.⁴³

⁴³ Total Running Time: 32:39 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 7

Application of God's Eternity

Application

We have been talking about divine eternity and God's relationship with time. We now want to come to an application of this to our lives. How does this impact our lives, this fact that God is eternal? I want to share two broad applications.

First is what I call the paradox of time. Time is paradoxical, when you think of God's being eternal. On the one hand, God has all the time in the world – and more if necessary! Therefore, God is never forced to hurry. He has no clock to punch. He has no deadlines to meet. God isn't pressed for time. Take Moses, for example. Moses, in the prime of his life at 40 years old and prince of Egypt – you would think now is the time that God would call him to lead his people into the Promised Land. But no! Instead, God leads him out into the desert to spend another 40 years as a shepherd before he is ready and prepared to lead the people into Israel – when he was 80 years old, after those 40 years of desert existence. God was in no hurry with Moses. 2 Peter 3:8 says that "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." So God's time table is right on schedule, and he doesn't need to be worried about things' falling behind.

One the other hand – and this is the other dimension of this paradox – time *is* short. Time is short for us. We have a transitory life that is fleeting and passing away. Therefore, we need to be engaged in doing the work of the Lord before it is too late. In Romans 13:11-12a, 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." So Paul says there are few hours left, wake up, and be about the work of the Lord. Similarly, in John 9:4, Jesus, somewhat changing the metaphor, says something very similar: "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night comes, when no man can work." Jesus is emphasizing in a slightly different way that the time is short and we need to be engaged in doing the works of God while we have time.

I think this paradox is both a comfort to those who are exhausted in the Lord's work but also an incentive for those who are lazy. For those who are exhausted in well doing, God says, "Don't be frazzled and hassled about it; things are under control; things are right on time; you don't need to burn yourself out in service to me." But on the other hand, for those who are living in self-indulgence and laziness and not really serving the Lord energetically, the time is short, and you'd better get it in gear – you'd better get moving and get going because soon the night is coming when no man can work. That is the first application.

The second application is that in virtue of God's being eternal we need to live in light of eternity. We are not just temporal creatures, we are now, in virtue of knowing Christ and

being born again, immortal creatures, who will live forever, and so we need to live in light of eternity. How can we do that? Let me mention three ways.

First of all, God's being eternal is an incentive to right living. Basically, what the Scripture says here is that we need to be ready to die. Our life is fleeting and transitory, we never know when it is going to end, and therefore we need to be ready.⁴⁴ James 4:13-17:

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. Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

So James is saying, don't presume about tomorrow. Tomorrow may never come for you. Rather, be prepared to die and make your plans with the contingency that if the Lord wills, then we will do this or that.

Similarly, Paul, immediately after that passage in Romans that we read before – in Romans 13:12b-14 – gives the application:

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 our unexpected but impending death, we need to be sure that we are living in a way that we are prepared to meet God, should we be called upon to do so.

Secondly, I think that living in light of eternity involves having a comfort in suffering. There is a comfort in what we suffer when we keep God's eternity and eternal life in mind. Sometimes the suffering of this life seems so intense, so unbearable, so grotesque in its cruelty; and yet from a Christian point of view, this life is just a cramped and narrow foyer that leads into the great banquet hall of God's eternity that we will someday inhabit. When we keep this perspective in mind, it can make our trials seem short by comparison. 1 Peter 5:10: "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." In light of the eternal glory in Christ that we will have, Peter says, suffer during this life for a little while, until you go into the eternal glory with Christ.

2 Corinthians 4 is one of the greatest reflections on this contrast that is in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Paul talks about all of the things that he suffered in his ministry and in his life. He then says,

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature 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.

⁴⁴ 4:44

Here Paul compares the suffering of this life with the infinite stretch of time that we will spend in eternity with God. And he says, compared to that infinite eternity of joy with God, the sufferings of this life by comparison shrink to an infinitesimal moment. That is why Paul can call them a slight, *momentary* affliction. They are simply overwhelmed by the ocean of divine eternity and joy that God will bestow upon his children in heaven. So when we go through times of difficulty and intense suffering, keeping eternity in mind and living in that light can help us to bear with grace and strength those trials that God calls upon us to bear.⁴⁵

Third, and finally, God's eternity holds out for us the wonderful prospect of eternal life. For us who are in Christ, all of eternity awaits us. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." God has given us everlasting life in Christ. That is what awaits us! How will we spend eternity? Ephesians 2:7 has an interesting reflection on this. Speaking of how we will be raised up with Christ, Paul says, "in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." God will spend eternity showering upon us his kindness from his immeasurable riches of grace! That is how we will spend eternity, enjoying the kindness of God, which is just like an ocean rolling over us for all eternity.

Now what a contrast for those who are outside of Christ, who have no hope of eternal life! For those who are outside of Christ, time is a devouring beast. The life that they have now is fleeting, transient, ephemeral, and will soon come to an end. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:32, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" Basically life becomes meaningless. I am reminded of those lines of Shakespeare in *Macbeth* where Lady Macbeth, near the end of her life, seeing the disaster that has ensued from her and her husband's conspiracies, about to take her own life, says,

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.

That is what life is to those without Christ. The book of Ecclesiastes 1:14 says, "All is vanity and a striving after wind."

Of course, the reality is that it is not just annihilation that they face but the terrible prospect of judgment before the throne of a Holy God. Matthew, in his Gospel, gives the teachings of Jesus concerning the final judgment in Matthew 25:34, 41, and 46:

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.

What a contrast there is between those who know Christ and those who don't in terms of this wonderful prospect of everlasting life that an eternal God has given us!

In all of these different ways, we as Christians need to live different kinds of lives than

⁴⁵ 9:55

the secular person lives. We need to live, not in light of the immediate realities of this ephemeral and transitory world, but we need to live in light of eternity and its values. God, who is from everlasting to everlasting, has given us everlasting life.⁴⁶

DISCUSSION

Question: Some critics of Christianity accuse us of being fatalistic. How do you avoid fatalism if you say the world we are living in is unimportant?

Answer: I do not think you are talking about fatalism because fatalism is the view that everything that happens happens necessarily, that there is nothing you can do to avoid your fate. That is a very different doctrine. I think what you are talking about would be a kind of other-worldliness that would see this world as unimportant in light of eternity – that we believe in pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by and therefore Christians are not engaged in, say, the fight against poverty and disease and the ills of this world.

I think that fails to recognize two very fundamental factors. First of all, this world is the preparation for eternity. This world is not unimportant because how you choose, during this life, determines where you will spend eternity. We have a freedom undreamed of by the existentialist philosophers, namely, the freedom to determine our own eternal destiny. So the choices we make in this life are infused with eternal significance, whereas on the naturalistic view, ultimately, the entire universe is doomed to perish in the heat death of the cosmos, and nothing really matters. The contributions of the scientist, the research of the doctor to alleviate pain and suffering, the effort of the diplomat to secure peace in the world – all of these sacrifices ultimately come to nothing on the naturalistic view because they don't make any difference. On a Christian view, we see this life as filled with an eternal significance in light of its outcome.

But then, secondly, that attitude fails to take account of the ethical teachings of Jesus. Jesus has given us certain ethical rules about the way to live, and that includes loving your neighbor as yourself. This is the second and great commandment. So, of course, the Christian would be concerned about poverty and education and disease and so forth because we are committed to loving our neighbor as ourselves and living out the life of Christ. So don't think that the fact that we have this wonderful hope and should live this life in light of it in any way makes this life unimportant or trivial. I would say quite the contrary is true.

Question: About time and eternity – you had mentioned that God entered the universe at the point of creation and from there to eternity is within time. If time started at creation, then at the end of creation, would then time not also end?

Answer: Very good question! When we speak of creation, we are speaking in the most general terms possible. Anything that exists that is not God *is* creation. Remember our discussion about divine aseity: anything that is other than God is a creature; it is made by God. Only God is self-existent and independent. So in that sense creation will never cease to exist. There will always be creation. There will be angels, there will be human beings, there will be a new heavens and a new Earth. God is not going to annihilate creation and

⁴⁶ 14:24

return to just existing alone, just the three persons of the Trinity. There will always be creation. But what will happen – and you are correct to point this out – is that this universe will be in some way destroyed or transformed, to be replaced by a new heavens and a new Earth, which may operate according to very different laws of nature, for all we know. In that sense, our clocks would not perhaps work in that new universe, that new heavens and new Earth. So, in that sense, the kind of physical time that our clocks measure and that scientists talk about, yes, may well come to an end, when this cosmos terminates. But it doesn't mean that time itself will come to an end because there will always be a before and after. Resurrection bodies are dynamic and active entities; they are not frozen like ice statues. We are going to be acting and interacting with one another. So there will always be before and after and, hence, time. So you are quite right that it may be a time that is quite unlike our physical time.⁴⁷

Question: If time started at the point of creation, are you saying that the origin of Satan as a fallen angel, that the creation of angels, were they part of a time sequence or did that happen prior to creation?

Answer: That is a very good question. I am assuming for the sake of simplicity that time began at the Big Bang, at the beginning of the universe. But, conceivably, it could have begun before, when God created angelic realms. In fact, there is nothing in the Scripture that I can find that indicates when God created the angels and those that fell that became demons. As far as I can tell, it could be subsequent to Genesis 1:1, which says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth." So just for the sake of simplicity, I am assuming that time begins at the moment of the creation of space. But theoretically, it could have begun earlier if there were a creation of spiritual, angelic realms and that was followed by a physical cosmos. But I don't know any biblical verses that would support that it was done that way.

Question: Regarding to your first application, the moral incentive. How would you respond to the skeptic that would say that we don't need a sky-daddy to give us an incentive to do the right thing. We can do it on our own.

Answer: That is sort of what the humanist is saying: "Just do good for goodness sake." I do want to agree with that to a certain extent. We don't do good with an eye toward the reward we are going to get. It is not as though we love our neighbor because we are going to get another present in heaven. But, nevertheless, the point I was trying to make is that knowing you are going to be held responsible for your moral actions does add seriousness to the moral life. Anybody who has faced temptation knows that it is hard to do the right thing when you are confronted with temptation or an easy way out. Knowing that you are ultimately going to be held morally responsible for your actions does have a morally bracing effect, as opposed to thinking that it really doesn't matter how you choose. That is why Robert Adams, who is a great ethicist at Oxford University, has said that atheism is really a demoralizing worldview. By "de-moralizing" he meant that it tends to undermine the moral life because it is hard to do the right thing sometimes, and thinking or being convinced that it really doesn't matter how you choose, that ultimately your actions will not contribute to the universe's being a better place, tends to inculcate a sort of futility and sense of cynicism about the moral life, in contrast to Christian theism,

⁴⁷ 20:08

which says that we will be held morally accountable.

Question: From a humanist perspective, why do they feel harmed or wronged by believers in Christ? What is their motivation to debate you? Why don't they just live their life, and why do they have these campaigns on messages on buses and all that?

Answer: I think there are two motivations that are possible. One would be that they believe that people are victims of this gigantic superstition, this fairy tale, and that, therefore, it is better for these victims to know the truth about reality than to live in this fantasy world. They believe these victims need to grow up and be disabused of this illusion under which they suffer. But, secondly, – and now this is especially the case with the so-called New Atheists like Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens and so forth – they believe that religion is positively injurious, both personally and to society as a whole, that it is the cause of war, bigotry, other-worldliness, child abuse. They attribute almost every societal evil to religion and lay it at religion's doorstep. So the New Atheists are not just committed to getting rid of religion in the public square; they want to see religion entirely eliminated from society, even in the private realm, because they believe religion is so positively deleterious to society. Having said that, I think this is an enormously naive view of western civilization, that, in fact, the contribution of Christianity to the Western world is just overwhelmingly positive. In fact, someone just shared with me a book that has statistics in it on the history of warfare, where this fellow lists all the wars that have been fought since 2000 B.C. or so up to the present and – correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't he say that the percentage of religious wars, in which religion was involved, was something like 6.8%? And if you eliminate Islam as one of the contributing factors, then it is down to 3.2% or so. It is simply not true that religion is a major source of international conflict.⁴⁸

Question: We are taught that life expectancy has increased, and most of us think without careful consideration, well, we are guaranteed 80 years, but that means half of us don't live that long. We have to consider this brevity of life.

Answer: Thank you! These questions strike at the deepest existential issues of life and how we live.

Question: When atheists say that some sort of trick is being perpetrated on us – if they don't believe in good or bad, why do they care?

Answer: This is important! We must not misrepresent the humanists here. Humanists like Fred Edwords *do* believe in good and bad. They are committed to the intrinsic value of human beings in an atheistic universe. It is at that very point that I think the critique needs to be offered. They are affirming the same moral values that were once based in Christianity. It is because we are created in the image of God that human beings have intrinsic moral value. Having now discarded the foundation, they still want to claim the values. But once you get rid of God, then it is just not obvious why the herd morality evolved by humans on this planet is objectively true. Why is it that this species of primate, rather than orangutans or chimpanzees, is somehow the possessor of intrinsic moral value and has moral responsibilities and prohibitions to follow? Where did these come from on a naturalistic worldview? So, as depressing as it may sound, I find myself

⁴⁸ 26:13

much more convinced, frankly, of the nihilistic, Richard Dawkins view of humanity if atheism is true. I find the writings of people like Dawkins and existentialist philosophers, who emphasized the absurdity of life without God, to be very helpful and convincing here. Humanists find themselves in a real dilemma in wanting to continue to cling to these moral values and the specialness of human beings while having robbed human beings of any foundation for thinking that they are morally special.⁴⁹

Question: In light of the question about whether angels were created before or at the same time of the universe, Job 38:4-7 seems to indicate God created the angels prior.

Answer: So you are suggesting that that passage says the angelic host was created first and already existed and then rejoiced in God's work. I find that very persuasive. Thank you for sharing that passage with us! It is possible that what Job is talking about there is laying the foundations of the Earth, which comes in Genesis 1:2, prior to which came the creation of the universe. But, nevertheless, I think you are right in saying that that verse is potentially relevant to that issue.

Question: People still want to place an intrinsic moral value on humans. Even if aliens came to Earth and exterminated every human for alien food, they won't call that "good," even though on the naturalist view that's just natural selection on a cosmic scale!

Answer: The example you raise is a great example. Michael Ruse, who is an atheistic philosopher of science, actually wrote an article called, "Is Rape Wrong on Andromeda?" and he argues that we can imagine a civilization in some other galaxy in which rape would not be considered to be wrong. But then he begs off discussing what would happen if these aliens were to visit the Earth and what would be right and wrong for them to do. I think your question brings this right to the fore in terms of the kind of cosmic relativity that results in the absence of a transcendent, divine vantage point for determining what is really right or wrong.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ 29:53

⁵⁰ Total Running Time: 34:03 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 8

Infinite: Omnipresence

Infinite: Omnipresence

We have been talking about the attributes of God. We have discussed divine self-existence, or aseity, and then we talked about God's eternity, or his relationship with time. Now we want to turn to a discussion of God's omnipresence, which is God's relationship to space.

Scriptural Data

Let's begin by looking at some scriptural data concerning how God relates to space. First of all, the Scripture teaches that *God's presence is everywhere*. God is everywhere present. Psalm 139:7-12:

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.

Here the psalmist says that no matter where he goes, he finds God's presence there. Whether he ascends into heaven or descends into Sheol, the realm of the dead, God is there; there is no place that God is not present.

Jeremiah 23:23-24 is another lovely verse on God's omnipresence.

‘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, again, through the prophet, the Lord says, “There is no place you can hide yourself from me. I am not just a God that is locally present here. I am also far off. I fill heaven and Earth.” There is nowhere that God's presence does not reach.

So the first point that the Scripture teaches about God's omnipresence is that God is everywhere present.

Secondly, the Scripture teaches that *God does not dwell in a localized place*. 1 Kings 8:27 – this is Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, which was thought to be the place that God's presence would be especially evident. But Solomon says, “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!” So even though God can be encountered there in the temple, Solomon recognizes that God doesn't dwell in the temple. His presence isn't confined to some locality on Earth. He says on the contrary,

even the highest heaven cannot contain God, how much less this little building that I put together.

Acts 17:24 and 28a – this is Paul’s address in Athens as he stood in the Areopagus and the marketplace, with the great Parthenon behind him on the Acropolis. If you have ever been there, it is such a striking sight, as this magnificent temple to Athena towers over the city on the Acropolis, and you can just imagine Paul standing down there on the Areopagus and pointing up to this beautiful temple over his shoulder on the Acropolis, and he says in verse 24, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man” and later in verse 28, “for in him, we live and move and have our being.” Paul says that God doesn’t dwell in some temple like the Parthenon; this is not where God is located.⁵¹ Quite the contrary, he says we are located in God, in a sense. In him we live and move and have our being. We are surrounded by God’s presence. His presence is not localized in some temple or building, rather it is all around us.

So the second point that we want to make from Scripture is that God doesn’t dwell in a localized place.

DISCUSSION

Question: I see a lot of quotes about God being in all creation. Often, there is a fuzzy line between pantheism and panentheism – can you comment on this?

Answer: This is a very nice segue into discussing what omnipresence means. Although I hadn’t intended to do this, let’s distinguish it from these other two views. Pantheism is the view that everything is God, that God is the universe. So a pantheist is someone who would identify the universe with God; they are identical. God is not a transcendent being beyond the universe; instead the universe is God. Sometimes certain statements by atheistic scientists have a flavor of pantheism about them. Carl Sagan, the late astronomer, would often speak about the Cosmos (with a capital “C”) as having the attributes and character of God. For him, the Cosmos itself seemed to be an object of reverence, as almost holy and worthy of awe and worship. That would be an expression of pantheism, which identifies the world as God.

Panentheism is a different view. This is the view that the world is part of God. Typically, it would be said that the world is to God as our body is to our soul. God is like the soul of the world. So the world is God’s body, and in that sense he is not distinct from the world. The world is a part of God. So there is a part of God that is beyond the world, but nevertheless the world is still, on this view, “divinized;” it becomes part of God. This has become popular among a school of contemporary philosophy called “process theology” or “process theism,” where the world is the embodiment of God. As the world develops and unfolds, this represents God’s development and improvement and becoming better. On this view, God is not a perfect being; rather he is a being in process, and he is becoming better all the time. As we live better lives and contribute to the good of the world, we actually improve God because, as we improve the world, we are improving

⁵¹ 5:24

God. God gets “better and better every day in every way,” so to speak.

Those two views are very different from omnipresence, which is the view that God is distinct from creation, but nevertheless he is immanent in creation. Immanence is not like “imminent” with an “i,” as when we say, “Christmas is imminent” or “The second coming of Jesus is imminent,” that is, “about to happen.” This is “immanent” with an “a.” That means that God is present in the world. He is present in creation, though he is also transcendent. On the biblical doctrine of omnipresence, God is both transcendent in that he is distinct from the world (the world is not a part of God; it is not God; he transcends the world; he is not identical to the world; the world is a creature; it is a creation of God), but he is immanent as well, in that he is present in creation. We will talk in a moment about what that means, but that contrasts the notion of omnipresence with both pantheism and panentheism, which are heretical and need to be avoided.⁵²

Question: How does this relate to God and his sustaining power?

Answer: We will talk more about that when we get to the doctrine of creation. The traditional Christian doctrine of creation is that God did not simply bring the world into being at the beginning, but he also conserves the world in being moment by moment. It would be like a flutist who plays a note on the flute, and the note continues to exist, the sound continues to exist, only so long as the musician is blowing into the flute. Were he to cease to blow, the note would disappear. In a similar way, Christian theology thinks of creation as dependent upon God moment by moment for its existence, not just for its initial coming into being. We will talk about that more later on. That would not relate directly to our concern here about how God is present in creation.

Question: About process theism, I thought that was the same thing as “open theism.” Can you give some sort of brief elaboration on those two terms?

Answer: It is great to have these terminological distinctions made clear because we do not want to accuse someone of being something, when in fact he is not! Open theism is not the same as process theism, as I just described it. Open theism is a view that is a non-traditional understanding of God’s foreknowledge and providence. The open theist denies that God knows the future, at least exhaustively. Since God does not know what is going to happen, he takes risks and gambles with the world. He creates people, hoping they will come to know him personally and be saved, but he really doesn’t know that they will. Sometimes the open theist says this still gives you a strong sense of divine providence because God is like the grand master in chess who is playing against an amateur and who can predict the exact position and piece with which he will checkmate his amateur opponent. He can do this, not because he knows what the opponent will do, but because he is just so smart that he knows that however the opponent will move, he will outmaneuver him and checkmate him in exactly the way he predicted. So the open theist wants to say that God still has a considerable degree of control over the world, but nevertheless he takes risks, and he doesn’t know what is going to happen.

But the open theist doesn’t think that the world is the body of God or is divine or is part of God. The open theist can still think of God as distinct from the world and the world as a creature dependent upon God. What it does share with process theism is the view that

⁵² 10:27

God is in time and that he is developing and learning new things all the time; he doesn't have knowledge of the future. So there are points of contact with process theology, but let's be fair to the open theists. I am not sympathetic to open theism at all – I have written extensively against it – but we shouldn't accuse them of being things that they are not. They are not heretics in the sense of thinking that the world is divine or part of God. They are not panentheists or pantheists. An example of an open theist would be Gregory Boyd. He is a popular writer and pastor in Minnesota. Clark Pinnock has become an open theist as well. Those would be a couple of evangelical thinkers that embrace that view. Process theists would include people like Charles Hartshorne and Alfred Whitehead; and a good many people that are involved in the science and religion dialogue today have unfortunately bought into process theism. Pantheists would include Hindus and Buddhists, who think that the world is divine or is God.⁵³

Question: Can you explain how omnipresence applies to Christ?

Answer: Insofar as Christ is divine, that is to say, is the second person of the Trinity, he must have this attribute because he possesses the fullness of the divine nature. So we cannot say that the Father is omnipresent, but the Spirit and the Son are not. Insofar as the second person of the Trinity is God, he possesses all the attributes of deity. So that means that Jesus is omnipresent. That raises some questions about the incarnation because surely Jesus was in Palestine. He was located in a particular place. At advent time we think of Jesus lying in the manger. But the Christian doctrine of creation requires that although Jesus' human nature, his body, was locally present in the manger, or in Palestine, in his divine nature he was omnipresent and is omnipresent. This requires us to draw a distinction between the divine nature of Christ and the human nature of Christ. While the human nature of Christ is certainly spatially located, his divine nature is not. We will talk more about that when we get to the Doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of the incarnation.

Systematic Summary

As we think about the doctrine of omnipresence, there are two opposite errors that we need to avoid. First of all, we should not think of God as localized in any earthly spot. We should not think that God dwells upstairs in some building or that God is to be found in certain local places here on Earth. That is clearly contrary to the teaching of Scripture. But, equally, the opposite error is that we shouldn't think of God as localized in heaven. We should not think that God is "out there" in heaven sitting on the throne and that he is, therefore, not present here. I have been astonished, quite frankly, at the number of Christians who do think of God in those local terms – he is in heaven someplace, and that is where he is. That also needs to be avoided. God is not spatially located, either in an earthly location or even in a heavenly location. Rather the doctrine of omnipresence is that he is everywhere present. So we want to avoid both of those mistakes.

Having said that, the Bible isn't clear whether we should think of God as transcending space or as being everywhere throughout space. We have here a problem that is exactly analogous to the problem we encountered with divine eternity and God's relationship to

⁵³ 15:03

time. Remember, we saw that the Bible doesn't clearly distinguish for us if God is eternal in the sense of transcending time, being atemporal or timeless, not having any duration or extension in the temporal dimension, but just being outside of time. Nor does it distinguish for us if God can be thought of as being everlasting throughout time – beginningless and endless throughout time. We explored these two views of divine eternity and God's relationship with time, and I sought to defend a particular understanding of that. Just as the Bible isn't clear about the nature of divine eternity and God's relationship with time, so it is not clear about the nature of omnipresence and God's relationship to space. On the one understanding, we would say that God doesn't exist in space at all, that he transcends space and that he is not a spatial being in any way. On the other understanding we would say God does exist everywhere in space.

Traditionally, Christian theologians have not thought of God as being located in space. The Bible speaks of God in spatial terms.⁵⁴ “If I descend into Sheol, you are there; if I ascend into heaven, you are there,” and so forth. God is everywhere. “In him we live and move and have our being.” But many theologians would want to say that that kind of language is metaphorical, that in fact God is completely trans-spatial; he doesn't exist in our three-dimensional spatial or four-dimensional spacetime continuum at all.

How can we understand this? Since God is spirit, he has no body. God doesn't have a humanoid form. He doesn't have any kind of form. He is, if you will, a purely mental being. He would be like a soul without a body, a mind without a body. God has no body. If he is in space, he wouldn't be in space in any kind of a local sense. He would have to be in space everywhere.

But we shouldn't think of God as being in space in the sense of being spread out like an invisible ether throughout space. He is not like an invisible gas that is everywhere present in space. This would be incorrect for several reasons. For one, it would mean that if the universe is finite, which is perfectly possible, then God would be finite. We do not want to say that because God is infinite. More seriously, if God is spread out throughout space, like an invisible ether, that means that he is not fully present everywhere. Rather, there is only a part of God that is present here in this room – there is only a certain number of cubic meters of God that is in the room, and most of him is outside of the room. Surely that is not right; we don't want to think that I have a certain volume of God in my glass at the supper table and a larger volume of God inside of the house. We shouldn't think of God as being spread out like an ether throughout all of space.

God, if he is in space, would have to be fully present at every point in space. That is a very difficult notion to grasp. If God exists at every point in space, how can he be fully present at every point in space? It would seem that he would have to be related to the physical universe in a way that is analogous to the relationship of my soul, or my mind, to my body. I am a composite of a soul and a body. But my soul isn't located in any part of my body – it is not as if my soul is in my brain or that a soul is in certain neurons. The soul is an immaterial entity which is everywhere present throughout its body and controls the body, but there aren't pieces or parts of the soul that are in my foot or my arm. Rather the soul is everywhere fully present in the body, and one could say that God would be related to the world in a way similar to the way in which my soul or my mind is to my

⁵⁴ 19:48

body.

However, this comes very close to the view of saying that the world is the body of God – that would be panentheism, and we want to avoid that. The difference would be that, on this understanding of omnipresence, the world wouldn't be a part of God. It would be a creation of God, and God would work through it, but it isn't the means by which God senses and knows things in the way in which my soul senses things through the physical senses of my body. My body mediates to my soul through the nerve endings sensory input of visual experiences, aural experiences, as I hear things, tactile experiences, as I touch things. It is through the nerve endings in my body that this input comes to my soul. That is why, even though the soul is distinct from the body, if the body is impaired in some way through, say, drunkenness or drugs or brain damage, the function of the soul is impaired, and you can't think. The soul uses the body as an instrument by which it senses and acts in the world. That would not be the case for God. The world is not God's body in that sense. God transcends the world, and he doesn't use the world as a kind of sense organ through which he experiences and knows things.⁵⁵

If we do think of God as being in the world similar to the way in which the soul is in the body, it would be that God can immediately cause things to happen in the world in the way that my soul can immediately cause things to happen in my body. If I will to lift my arm, I can, with simply mental exertion, will to lift my arm, and all of a sudden, neurons fire, muscles contract, nerve endings send stimuli, and things happen in my body. I can have immediate effects in my body through the action of the mind, or the soul. Similarly, God could make immediate things happen in the world by his exercising his mental activity. But, he would not *be* the world; the world would not be his body, though there would be a kind of analogy between the way the soul acts in the body and the way God can act in space.

Sometimes theologians talk about the attribute of God's immensity. The immensity of God can be interpreted to be this sort of presence of God throughout space, whereby he is fully present at every point in space. So God is immense in the sense that he fills all of space and is immediately present at every point in space. That is one way to think about God's omnipresence – in terms of his immensity and his immediate and full presence at every point in space.

On the other hand, perhaps if we want to avoid the misunderstandings that are engendered by thinking of God's acting in the world in the way my soul acts in the body, we may say simply that God transcends space all together – that he isn't in space in any sort of literal sense. Rather God is an infinite mind who is conscious of and causally active at every point in space. That could be what it means that he is omnipresent – that he is conscious of and active at every point in space. That is to say, at every point in space, he knows what is happening at that point, and he is causally active at that point, at least in sustaining the world in being. On that view, God would not be in space in any sense at all. He would be a trans-spatial being or a non-spatial being. But omnipresence means that he is conscious of and causally active at every point in space.

I am going to leave this an open question. I think we can all agree that whichever view

⁵⁵ 25:09

you take, God's omnipresence means minimally that there is no place to which God's knowledge and power do not extend. Minimally, we can all agree on that. His knowledge and power extend to every point in space. And on that, both views at least can agree.

DISCUSSION

Question: I remember reading a theologian that said a spirit, since it is immaterial, is where it operates. And God operates throughout the universe, so God is omnipresent.

Answer: The only thing I would want to add to that would be in order to operate at every place, He needs to know what is happening at that place. It is not enough just to be causally active there, but he also needs to be aware of, or conscious of, what's going on there. With that understanding, that does seem to capture the essence of what I was trying to express.⁵⁶

Question: Regarding the transcendence of God, I see that as a close parallel to saying the whole of creation is a part of the mind of God. One of the things that science has come to, Bell's Theorem, is that you can take particles and separate them as far as you want and they are instantaneously connected. I think that is very strong evidence of God.

Answer: Let me respond to that before you go on. What this is talking about is a theorem developed by J.S. Bell about, say, two photons that are shot in opposite directions, and if you perform a measurement on one photon, the other one immediately takes on a correlated value. This seems contradictory to the idea that there can't be any signal that can travel faster than the speed of light because these are photons that are moving away from each other at the speed of light. So if you measure one of them, how does the other one "know" to flip to the right value, the correlated value? What this suggests is that there are relations of absolute simultaneity in the universe. This is one of the reasons that people are becoming more sympathetic to a non-Einsteinian view of relativity theory, which denied that there was absolute simultaneity in the universe. These new experiments suggest that in fact there are relations of absolute simultaneity in the universe. That has importance for the doctrine of divine eternity because then you could have a kind of absolute time frame in which God exists and knows and acts in the universe.

But I do not know what you mean when you say that it means that creation is a part of the mind of God. To me, that makes it sound as if the world is sort of like my dreams. When I have a dream, I create a whole mental world that I populate with unreal persons or unreal events, and they are just mental, just part of my mind, but they are not real. It seems to me that the doctrine of creation, especially for the Hebrew, is that the material world is a real thing that is different from God. It is not just in his mind; the material world is a real, extra-mental reality that is physical, and it is good. We should not do anything to depreciate the value of the physical in favor of the mental.

Followup: I do not see that much difference between the mental and the physical. As long as God can sustain any thought, so he can create a permanent thought within him. So there really isn't much difference.

⁵⁶ 29:37

Answer: So you are an idealist, which says that basically everything that exists are ideas.

Followup: In a certain sense. You can have a lot of concepts; the only ones that can lead us to more knowledge towards God are fruitful. In Acts where Paul was talking, “we all live and breathe within God,” I would think God is breathing his spirit into us, and I think he is talking that we live within the spirit that God put in us.

Answer: Look at the context, though, of Paul’s address. He is contrasting the Athenians’ belief that God (or the goddess) lives in this temple that has been built. And he says God doesn’t dwell in temples that are made by human hands; rather, in him we live and move and have our being. I think he is making a contrast between these local, pagan deities, that were thought to live in specific places, and God, who is immense in the sense that he fills all of space, so that we live and move and have our being in him. This is either that God transcends space but he operates at every point in space, or else he is immense in the sense that he is everywhere present throughout space in the way my soul is everywhere present throughout my body, rather than confined to a certain part of my cerebral cortex.

Question: It is common for the church to teach, or lead people to think, that in hell, God is not present. I am not sure if that is correct, because certainly God’s knowledge and power can extend there. Is that an incorrect teaching?

Answer: What I would want to do is to try to re-interpret what people mean when they say that God isn’t present in hell because clearly in the way we described it, he *is* present in hell. He knows what is happening there, and he is causally active there, sustaining it in being. What would it mean? When Scripture says that people are excluded from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his might, I think it is talking about a relational rupture. God is not present to the people in hell in a personal, relational sense. It is in that sense that they don’t have an experience of the presence of God. But certainly he is there cognitively and causally, though there is no relationship with God, and in that sense people in hell experience the utter absence of God. I would interpret it as a relational rupture.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Total Running Time: 36:25 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 9

Application of God's Omnipresence

Application

We have been looking at divine omnipresence. Last time we said that we can all agree that omnipresence means minimally that there is no place to which God's knowledge and power do not extend. God is present everywhere in the sense that he is cognizant of and active at every point in space. What application does this have to our lives as Christians?

First of all, it means that *we can contact God at any location*, no matter where we are. No matter where we are, God is there. Remember when you were a kid in grade school, the teacher would call the roll, and she would call your name, and you would respond, "Present!" In a similar way, no matter where we are, we can call upon God, and his response is, "Present!" He is there, wherever we can call upon him. I remember when Jan and I first moved to Europe, although it may sound silly, it was very reassuring to find that God was just as real there as he was back in the United States. It didn't make any difference moving from the United States to Europe. God was there, just as real and active as he was when we lived in America. So wherever you go in the world, you find the Lord's presence is there, and his people are there, and God is active with them. So we can contact God at any location anywhere.

Secondly, *we should practice the presence of God*. Since God is present everywhere, then wherever we are, we should practice the presence of God. I am not talking about cranking up some sort of emotion, but I mean just recognizing that God is with us wherever we are. He is alongside of us, so to speak. So if we are in a situation where we are tempted to sin, we need to remember that God is there with us. We are not hiding from him. We should recognize that he is watching us when temptation to sin comes. We should also thank God for his presence. Sometimes I am amused when people pray, "Lord, be with so-and-so as she goes through surgery" or "Be with so-and-so, who is going on a missions trip." You don't need to pray such a thing. God has already promised to be with them – he has already said he is there. What we ought to do is to thank God for his presence, not pray that he would be with us. Say, "Thank you that you are with us, that you are here, as we gather in your name!" That is a way of cultivating this heightened sense of the presence of God in which we live.

Finally, this involves realizing that *we are never alone* no matter what we go through. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus says, "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." No matter what we go through – a witnessing situation, sharing Christ with another person, going through deep suffering, trouble, hardship, if we are involved in study or in work – God is there, too. We are never alone. Therefore, we can depend upon him as we go through our daily lives. Psalm 23:4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me." That is the promise that we have of God's presence.

The omnipresence of God can be a source of strength and comfort and conviction for us as we lead our daily lives.⁵⁸

DISCUSSION

Question: If we can call on God from any location, does that also include non-Christians? Does God hear the prayers of non-Christians?

Answer: Do you remember some time ago, one Christian leader got into real trouble for saying something like, “God doesn’t hear the prayers of the Jew.” We know what he meant, but I think that that was inappropriate to say that. God is omnipresent, he is omniscient, so he knows what is being prayed. It is up to his sovereign discretion whether or not he wants to answer that prayer. That person doesn’t have the advantage of praying in Jesus’ name that we, as Christians, enjoy, as his adopted children. But if there would be a Cornelius in the book of Acts, a God-fearer who is seeking God, and he were to ask God to reveal himself to him more clearly, God might well answer that prayer by bringing a Peter to proclaim the Gospel more fully. If there were some other sort of prayer that that person was offering that God knew would be helpful in bringing that person to a knowledge of himself, I think certainly God in his sovereignty has the prerogative to answer anybody’s prayer. It is just that the non-believer doesn’t have that added advantage of being able to pray in Christ’s name and so to claim those promises which adopted children of God have.

Question: In the Scripture it says, “When there are two or more gathered in my name, then I will be present with you” – what does that mean?

Answer: That is a promise that Jesus gave. I take it to mean that when the church of Jesus Christ assembles as a group, that Christ is present in their midst through his Holy Spirit. Christ is not physically present because he is ascended to heaven. He left this spacetime universe until his personal return at the end of human history. But, while Christ is absent physically, his Holy Spirit continues his ministry and stands in the place of Christ. As you read, for example, the book of Romans, it is very interesting to see how sometimes the Holy Spirit will be referred to as Christ. In Romans 8:9-10, Paul says that if you have the *Spirit of God* within you, then your spirits are alive, even though your bodies are dead because of sin. But if *Christ* is in you, then he says, you are alive. He equates Christ and the Spirit of Christ because they are so closely united. I take it that the body of Christ, which is the church, is where the Holy Spirit of Christ dwells in a special way. That is what that promise refers to, about those who gather in his name. That was why I prayed this morning in our opening prayer, “Thank you, Lord, as we gather in your name, that you are here in the midst of us!” We can claim that promise.

Question: There is an evangelism program called “Share Jesus without Fear,” and one of the steps is to pray that the Holy Spirit will go ahead of you and prepare the heart of the person you are going to meet.

Answer: We often would do that when we go out on sharing campaigns with Campus Crusade. They always encourage people that before you talk to men about God, you

⁵⁸ 4:54

should talk to God about men. That is, to pray that the Holy Spirit would direct you to persons whose hearts are receptive and would respond to the Gospel in an appropriate way if they heard it.

Infinite: Immutability

Let's go on to our next attribute, which is the divine attribute of immutability. Let's look at some scriptural data concerning this attribute.

Scriptural Data

First, the Scripture indicates that *God is unchangeable in his existence*. Psalm 102:27: "but thou art the same, and thy years have no end." God will never cease to exist; he will exist forever; he is unchangeable in his existence.

Secondly, *God is unchanging in his character*.⁵⁹ Malachi 3:6: "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed." God is unchanging in his character, and that is why the sons of Israel are not destroyed. James 1:17 also speaks to this property of God: "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." With God, there is no change in his character, no shadow due to his changing person.

Thirdly, *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." There the Lord's faithfulness is spoken of as enduring to all generations, as being unchanging. Then in the New Testament, Hebrews 6:17-18:

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.

There it refers to the unchangeable character of God's promise and then also his unchangeable oath, which serve as a basis for our encouragement and confidence in God. So God is unchangeable in his faithfulness.

Finally, *God is unchangeable in his wisdom*. Psalm 33:11: "The counsel of the LORD stands for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."

The Scripture indicates that God is unchangeable in his existence, his character, his faithfulness, and in his wisdom.

DISCUSSION

⁵⁹ 10:00

Question: How do you explain the parts in Scripture where God appears to change his mind? For example, with Moses when he said he was going to destroy the Israelites but then chose not to.

Answer: We will talk some more about that when we get to God's omniscience because if God is omniscient and knows everything, how can he change his mind? Yet you have these stories in the Scripture where God changes his mind. This gets right to the heart of what kind of literature the Bible is. It cannot be overemphasized that the Bible is not a book of systematic theology, or philosophical theology. Rather, it is a storybook. It is a book of stories of how people relate to God. It is told from the human perspective. These stories are filled with what are called "anthropomorphisms" – portrayals of God in human terms.⁶⁰ For example, it is not just that God changes his mind about the future; you have the story, for example, of God's going to Abraham and saying, "I am on my way down to Sodom and Gomorrah because I heard these reports about the bad things going on there, and I'm going there to see if they are true." Well, in a case like that, God wouldn't even know what is happening in the world, if you take that literally. It is clear that these are just reflections of the storyteller's art. If you imagine these ancient Hebrews passing on these oral traditions, telling these stories about Israel's relations with Yahweh, these are going to be told with all of the color and the verve that goes with that kind of a story. So you always need to interpret the Scripture in light of the more didactic parts of Scripture – that is to say, where doctrine is actually taught. There you do see the kinds of teachings that God knows all things, that he does foreknow the future. The New Testament even has a word for foreknowledge ("pro-gnosis" meaning "fore-knowledge"). It attributes *prognosis* to God. That is how I would understand these stories – that they are told from a human perspective and must not be pressed for theological detail.

Question: In Islam, a law is believed to be able to change – where God can change anything he wanted. Can you comment on that?

Answer: In Islam, the central attribute of God is his omnipotence. So God's omnipotence trumps everything in Islam. If, on the judgment day, God would surprise everyone by saying, "All of you faithful Muslims, I have decided you are all going to hell!," the Muslim would have no recourse but to say, "It is the will of Allah!" and submit to the will of this omnipotent being. So there is a kind of capriciousness and arbitrariness with Allah that you do not find with the Judeo-Christian God, who has an unchangeable character that can be relied upon and that is not sheer, unbridled power. He has all the power that the Qur'an attributes to Allah, but it is power that is channeled through the essence of a being who is perfectly holy, loving, faithful, loyal, kind, and all of those other attributes. That is a very central difference between the concept of God in Islam and Christianity.

Question: Could you comment on the supposed difference between the Old Testament (emphasis on justice and judgment) and the New Testament (emphasis on loving and forgiveness).

Answer: This idea that the God of the Old Testament is this judge that is harsh and unbending and unkind, whereas the New Testament God is loving and merciful and forgiving, is just a false dichotomy. I do not understand how people who know the whole

⁶⁰ 14:52

Old Testament and New Testament can say such a thing. Certainly you can pick out passages in the Old Testament about God's judgment that shows severity and his wrath. But then, for goodness sake, read the book of Revelation if you don't think that that is in the New Testament! And if you find in the Sermon on the Mount a God who is compassionate and good and generous, then read chapters 18 through 31 in Ezekiel, where God says to Ezekiel, "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked and not rather that the wicked turn from his way and live? Turn back, why will you die?" He literally pleads with the people to repent, so he won't have to judge them because he loves them and he doesn't want them to die. He takes no pleasure in punishing the wicked. This is just a false dichotomy between the God of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

But the clearest and most decisive proof of this is the following: who was the God revealed by and worshiped by Jesus? It was the God of the Hebrew Bible! Jesus was a Jew. And it was the God of the Old Testament that Jesus revealed to people as his heavenly Father. He saw no inconsistency between what he taught and the Father that he revealed and the God of the Hebrew Bible that he worshiped and followed as his heavenly Father. That is the decisive indication that this is a false dichotomy that is based on selectively picking certain passages and contrasting them.⁶¹

Question: At the same time, though, on the point where God doesn't take pleasure in the death of the wicked, you read in the Psalms a lot about things like he is laughing at the wicked or when the wicked is being punished he laughs at them.

Answer: Well, we would need to look up some specific verses; but there are verses that I can think of that come to mind where it says that God sees the wicked scheming against him and he laughs at them in derision. I take that to mean that he finds these petty efforts to trump him and his plan to be ridiculous and futile. So, yes, the Lord holds them in derision – that these puny, wicked people could think that they are going to resist his purposes and his plans for them! But I don't see that as at all inconsistent with what the Old Testament also teaches, namely, that God loves every person and wants the wicked to repent and believe. One illustration of this would be what God did through Jonah to Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, a pagan nation. This wasn't part of Israel! This was a *pagan* nation, and God sends a *Jewish* prophet to Nineveh so that they will repent of their sins and he won't have to judge them and they will be saved. And remember, Jonah is resentful that this happens! He *wanted* them to be judged. But God says, in effect, "There are 200,000 people in this city who don't know their left hand from their right. Shouldn't I have compassion on them?" This is the God of the Old Testament, the God revealed by Jesus, the God who loves every person, even those who are spurning him and deserve his judgment! He will stay his judgment upon them if they will simply respond to his offer to repent and turn to him.

What we will want to do next time then is look at a systematic treatment of the doctrine of immutability or the unchangeableness of God. We will see that this is traditionally understood in terms that are quite different from the biblical terms. Then we will try to

⁶¹ 20:37

sort out how exactly we should understand God's immutability.⁶²

⁶² Total Running Time: 23:22 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 10

Infinite: Immutability

Systematic Summary

We have been talking about divine immutability as the last of the infinite attributes of God. We saw last week that the Scripture teaches that God is unchangeable in various ways. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, in particular the kind of neo-Platonism that Origen exemplified, traditional Christian theology came to understand God's immutability to mean absolute unchangeability in every respect. God does not change in any way at all. He is absolutely unchangeable. Aristotle referred to God as the Unmoved Mover. That is to say, God is the source of all change or motion in the world, but he is himself utterly unmoved and changeless – he cannot change.

Traditional View

The appropriation of this Greek concept of immutability led to a Christian doctrine of God as similarly unmoved and unchangeable. For Aristotle, God was absolutely unchangeable in every respect, and so he moved things in the world simply by being an object of desire, rather the way a statue would move someone to admiration by viewing it. The statue was immobile; it doesn't do anything; but as you look at it, you are moved with admiration at its beauty and the craft of the artist. In a similar way, Aristotle's God caused change in the world simply by being the object of desire by things in the world.

In contrast to that, the God that you read about in the Bible is not this sort of static, unchangeable entity. He is the living God, the living God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He is not frozen into immobility like an ice statue or a mannequin in a store window. Rather, he is an active God who is engaged with people and events in human history. He acts and reacts in personal relationships. The biblical passages that we looked at with respect to God's immutability certainly don't teach that God is immutable in this sort of absolute sense. Rather, it talks about how he is unchanging in his character and his faithfulness and his wisdom and his existence. He is unchangeable in those respects, but he is not frozen into immobility.

So if we are to adjust or compromise this biblical view, we would have to have good arguments for doing so. I, frankly, don't think there are any good arguments for this absolute immutability. The typical one that is offered is that God, by definition, is perfect. He is the most perfect being, and therefore there is nothing that could be done to improve him. He is the greatest conceivable being. Therefore, any change in God would have to be a change for the worse. But since God is perfect, he cannot become worse. Therefore, he cannot change. That is the fundamental argument for this strong doctrine of immutability – the argument from God's perfection.

It seems to me that this argument is just obviously wrong because change can be value neutral. You can have a change that is a "lateral" change rather than a "vertical" change

for better or for worse. For example, suppose God changes in that at 3:00 he knows that it is now 3:00, and at 3:01 he now knows that it is 3:01. But at 3:02, he no longer believes that; he now believes it is 3:02. God, in that case, is changing. There is a change in his consciousness. But that isn't a change for the worse! God doesn't change for the worse in believing at 3:01 that it is no longer 3:00. If anything, it is a measure of his perfection that he always knows what time it is! In virtue of his omniscience, he always knows what is going on in the world.⁶³ So, actually, it would seem indicative of his *perfection* that God would change in that way. This argument is, therefore, obviously wrong – you can have changes that are neither for the better nor for the worse but are just neutral.

Revised View

Therefore, we have no reason to adjust the biblical view of God as an active being that undergoes change. If that is right, how are we to understand God's immutability? J. I. Packer, in his book *Knowing God*, has given a good summary of God's immutable attributes. This is what Packer has to say:

First of all, he says, God's *life* does not change. As we have seen, God exists forever. He never comes into being; he never goes out of being. Moreover, he neither matures nor regresses. That is the truth in the argument that God doesn't increase in perfection or grow worse.

Secondly, Packer says, God's *character* does not change. God is immutable in his mercy, love, faithfulness, justice, and so forth. His character is constant and immutable; he cannot change in his character.

Thirdly, Packer says, God's *truth* does not change. The Word of the Lord abides forever. That doesn't mean that God can't have different covenants with the human race. There is an Old Covenant and a New Covenant, obviously, but God's Word is true and dependable and in that sense is unchanging.

Fourth, Packer says, God's *ways* do not change. God is always consistent in dealing with humanity. He punishes sin, and he bestows grace. God can be counted upon to be consistent in the ways that he will deal with humanity.

Fifth, Packer says, God's *purposes* do not change. God's plans are from eternity past with full foreknowledge of the future. God does not gamble on the future, he doesn't need to revise things, he doesn't need to have contingency plans because he has full foreknowledge of the future and his plans are from eternity, from before the foundations of the world, so there is no need to change in his purposes.

Finally, sixth, Packer says, God's *Son* does not change. Here he quotes Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Again, one would need to analyze that in terms of his constancy, his character, his consistency, and so forth.

I think that is really what the biblical passages on divine immutability are getting at. That is a nice summary of what is meant by God's immutability. It doesn't imply the kind of absolute unchangeability that Greek philosophy implied.

⁶³ 5:15

DISCUSSION

Question: Can you give another example besides the idea that God knows the difference between the time 3:00, 3:01, etc. as far as his changeability?

Answer: Imagine what God is thinking about that is happening right now. When he was leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, he knew, “The Red Sea is now parting, and the children of Israel are passing through.” He doesn’t know that now – what he knows now is, “Centuries ago, the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea, and I led them out of bondage.” Similarly, when the crucifixion was happening, God knew that Christ was dying on the cross. But he doesn’t know that now because Christ isn’t dying on the cross *now*; he died on the cross in the past. What God knows now is what is happening now in the universe. He knows that George Bush is about to relinquish the U.S. presidency and that President-elect Obama is about to be inaugurated.⁶⁴ That would be a change in God’s knowledge that would be constantly going on as time flows. Of course, he still has his memory of those events, but there would be a stream of consciousness in God’s mind – what is he now conscious of, as it is happening now. Certainly, he doesn’t forget about the exodus – but you have to grasp the radical nature of the traditional immutability doctrine! The traditional immutability doctrine is believed hardly at all in Protestant circles. You don’t hear this preached anymore; this is not part of Christian piety. The original immutability doctrine is very radical. It is that God doesn’t change *in any way*. None of his properties changes. He is absolutely identical all the time. There is just no change at all. It is a very, very radical doctrine. I think most of us think that this isn’t what the Bible is teaching and that there isn’t any good reason to believe this radical view.

Question: It seems like most of the things you listed were really just saying his character doesn’t change.

Answer: I thought the first point about his life – he doesn’t come into being or go out of being and he doesn’t mature or regress – that is more than just character, and that is important as well.

Question: What about when the Bible says, “I was dead but am now alive forever more.”

Answer: That would be the human nature of Jesus. Certainly, Jesus in his human nature changes. Even those that hold the strong doctrine of immutability would say that while the second person of the Trinity does not change in his divine nature, certainly he changes in his human nature.

Question: Number four, “he is constant in his purpose.” Isn’t this being legalistic?

Answer: Remember how Packer explicates this. I thought the same thing when he said that. There is the Old Covenant in which God dealt with people in a very different way than under the New Covenant. There were clean and unclean food laws, and ritual sacrifices to do, and temple worship, and so forth. But what Packer says is that God is consistent in the way he deals with man. He punishes sin, he bestows grace, and God isn’t going to be like, say, the God of the Qur’an, who is arbitrary and capricious in the way he deals with human beings – or the way the pagan gods of Roman and Greek

⁶⁴ 10:00

mythology were inconsistent and capricious. What Packer is wanting to say here is that God, in the way he relates to us, is consistent, though you are right in that it can manifest itself in different ways.

Question: On Aristotle and his Unmoved Mover, it sounds like what Packer describes. How is Aristotle's God a Mover unlike the God of your 3:01 and 3:02 example?

Answer: Very good question! Aristotle believed that the Earth lay at the center of the universe. He had a geo-centric cosmology. The Earth was at the center, and then there were spheres around the Earth – you may have heard of the expression “the music of the spheres,” that comes from Greek cosmology. Embedded in these spheres were these various astronomical bodies like the moon. Beyond the moon were the spheres of the various planets. As the spheres would rotate, the lunar and planetary bodies would rotate. Finally, in the outermost sphere, were the fixed stars. Motion would be transmitted down to the Earth through these spheres. As these spheres would turn, it was like this great engine, and they would cause motion to be produced down on Earth – like the tides, for example. Where does God fit into this?⁶⁵ For Aristotle, he called the Unmoved Mover “God” (*theos* in Greek). God was outside this system of the spheres, and the souls of these spheres would look at God as the greatest, highest good. As the souls of the spheres would contemplate God as the highest good, they would be moved by desire. There would be this love, as it were, a kind of rapture because God is the greatest good. This would be expressed in the only way they knew how – which was rotary motion. It would make the spheres revolve. So for Aristotle, God never really did anything in the universe. He never acted in the world or created the universe – he was completely detached, apart, and transcendent. But he is the Mover of everything by being an object of desire. It is kind of the way a statue moves a person by being an object of desire. That is very different from the biblical notion of God as someone who is acting and reacting in history and being involved. I hope that gives you a little bit more historical background on this.

Question: Can you say what the traditional, orthodox view is protecting us from by going to the extreme absolute view and what we want to avoid on the other extreme, something like open theism?

Answer: I think that is the motivation for the strong immutability doctrine. It is to avoid any kind of process theology – a theology which would see God as himself in a process of becoming more perfect. – in other words, seeing God as an imperfect deity who is evolving and to whom we can contribute worth by what we do. We can improve him. So the motives are laudable, to want to preserve God's absolute perfection and to say he doesn't mature or regress; but it is using a sledgehammer to crack a peanut. You do not need radical immutability in order to secure those theological benefits.

Question: How does this traditional view deal with God's obvious emotions, for instance, “slow to anger”? This dictates a capacity for change.

Answer: Aristotle's God is “unmoved,” not only in the sense that he doesn't change, but he is also unmoved in the sense that he doesn't care, either. He is unmoved in the sense that he has no passions. Traditional Christian theology has affirmed that God has no emotions. Traditional Christian theology says God is impassible. That is one of the

⁶⁵ 15:12

attributes of God that I do not have on my list in this class to discuss because I do not think it is true. In all candor, this is one of the traditional attributes of God – that he is impassible, which means he has no passions. So emotions like anger, compassion, tenderheartedness, and all of these things that are ascribed to God in the Bible are taken to be anthropomorphisms. They are not literal; they just reflect our perspective. But that is very difficult – I mean, you would have to have really good reasons to think that God doesn't really have compassion for us and that it wasn't compassion that moved him to send his Son and that he doesn't really get angry with sinners, and so forth. Passions traditionally were associated with the physical body, and since God doesn't have a physical body, it was thought he couldn't have any passions. That is the traditional view, but it is one that I do not agree with, and I don't see any good argument for.⁶⁶

Question: I attended a conference on evangelism, and one of the speakers relayed a story about his time in seminary when one of his professors said, "I hear the footsteps of Aristotle echoing through the halls of this institution more so than Jesus Christ himself." That is a rough paraphrase, but can you comment on why he would say such a thing?

Answer: It is evident that he thought that some of the Aristotelian influence upon Hebraic concepts of God was negative: the God of Aristotle was different from the God of ancient Judaism and had distorted the concept of God. However, I want to distance myself very much from that kind of seminary professor. I am glad I shared what I did from Origen's letter this morning [*N.B. this was an unrecorded preliminary devotional thought*] because I agree with Origen that we need philosophy in order to do good systematic theology. But philosophy can lead us astray, as well as to truth, and we need to be critical and make sure we have good arguments. But those who naively say, "Oh, just go back to the God of the Bible, and we don't need philosophy!" are not going to understand things like the doctrine of the Trinity, the personhood of Christ, and the two natures of Christ because all of those essential Christian doctrines are cashed out in terms of philosophy. Things like the concept of a person – that modern concept of what it is to be a person – arose out of the debates over the Trinity among the early church fathers. The idea of natures – Christ's having a divine nature and a human nature – that comes out again from Greek philosophy. So the heritage from Greek philosophy that Christianity has is not unequivocal. There are good and bad sides to it. But I do not in any way sympathize with seminary professors who trash Greek philosophy and say that we just have to use the Bible and we don't need to exploit these philosophical resources. I think those are the people that are most apt to be misled by unconscious philosophical presuppositions that are uncritically taken on board and not examined and so get into all kinds of problems – like open theism, process theology, and so forth.

Question: We say, "God is Love" – does that not fall under passion or emotion?

Answer: I think it has to do with passion, but for someone like Thomas Aquinas, he would say that God's love doesn't involve this kind of emotion. It doesn't involve compassion. He would certainly affirm that God is loving in the sense that he wills our good and he wants what is good for us, but he doesn't have this sort of emotional warmth that we associate with the word "compassion." So someone like Aquinas would say God doesn't have passions, he doesn't have compassion, but he does love us in the sense that

⁶⁶ 20:00

he has this desire for our good and he works for our redemption, and so forth. But it is sort of a cold understanding of love that certainly doesn't sound like love as we know it and experience it.

Question: About process theology – to me that sounds like they have gone wrong but that there is a thing of truth that we shouldn't throw out. And that is the sin of idolatry is stubbornness, where you cease to come closer to God. So it is not God that is changing, it is our perception of God.

Answer: For these process thinkers, it definitely is God who is changing.⁶⁷

Application

Let me say some words about application of this attribute as I have explained it.

First of all, one application is that it means that God is the source of our stability in life. In life, all we see about us is in flux. Everything is changing all around us. But in God, we have eternal permanence and stability. The scriptural metaphor that is used to express this is that God is our rock. Over and over again in the Psalms you have this metaphor of God as the rock to express this sort of stability. For example, Psalm 18:2: "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." Or, if you turn to Psalm 62:5-7: "For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is God." Our stability in life needs to rest upon God as our changeless Creator and not upon changing creatures, which are ever in flux. What this means, basically, is that people-dependers get hurt. People are changeable, they will disappoint you, they will betray you, they will let you down. So if you are a people-depender, you will ultimately get hurt. Your only source of lasting stability in life is God himself because of his immutable character and attributes.

Secondly, it means that God is always receptive. When we were little kids, you may remember sometimes you wanted to get something from Dad and you had to wait until you got Dad in a good mood. Then you would come to him with what you wanted. With God, it is not like that. God isn't moody; God isn't prone to different moods. Rather, we can have confidence that his love and his justice are constants with him and that therefore we can approach him on that basis. We don't ever have to worry that God has grown so disgusted with us, and our sin and fallibility is so bad, that he has abandoned us and is over and done with us. On the other hand, it also means God can't be compromised either. His justice is as unchanging as is his love. So you can't come to God on your terms, trying to weedle a deal with him, as you tried to soften up Dad to get something out of him. You don't come to God on your terms – you come to God on his terms. And when you do so, you will find him receptive. So the immutability of God means that God is not going to give up on us; he is always going to be receptive. But he is receptive on his terms, he is not someone that can be compromised by bribing him or dealing with him.

⁶⁷ 25:03

Thirdly, it means that we are secure in our relationship with God. This is the real implication of Malachi 3:6-7, which is the classic verse on divine immutability that is always quoted. Malachi 3:6-7 gives God's immutable invitation to his people:

For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

That is God's immutable offer. "You turn to me, and I will then turn to you." You come to God on his terms, and he will be receptive of you. This is his immutable invitation based on his unchanging character.⁶⁸

2 Timothy 2:11-13 gives us the assurance of God's faithfulness,

The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.

Here you see on the one hand God's uncompromising character – if you deny him, he will deny you – but if we are faithless, he still remains faithful. He is still there; if you will come to him, repent of your sins, and seek his grace and his face, he is there and is receptive. He is always faithful. It is we who are the ones that are faithless and who separate ourselves from him. Our security is not to be found in ourselves; it is to be found in God, who is unchanging and receptive and stable and constant in his character and open to us when we come to him in humility and contrition and repentance for our sins.

To wrap up this first section of our study of God's attributes, this is the infinite God of the universe: self-existent, necessary, eternal, omnipresent, immutable. If you want something to meditate on, try God! If you want to expand and fill your mind, try God! If you want to find someone to be completely absorbed with, try God! I come back to Charles Spurgeon's words with which we began this section,

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.

Next time we will begin to look at God's personal attributes; those attributes that he has in virtue of being a personal being. These are attributes which we share to a finite extent – incorporeality, intelligence, volition and moral attributes.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ 29:37

⁶⁹ Total Running Time: 32:40 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 11

Personal: Incorporeality

Personal: Incorporeality

We are going to turn to a discussion of God's attributes as a personal being. Many people that I have talked to have no trouble at all conceiving of God as an infinite being, but they resist vigorously the idea that God can be personal as well. They seem to think that personhood is incompatible with infinity. If God is infinite, then he can't really be a personal being as well. But this is quite unjustified. God possesses all of the attributes essential to personhood (which are the same attributes that we possess), such as intellect, self-consciousness, and will. But he possesses these to an infinite degree. In this sense, these attributes are communicable to us – though God has them infinitely, we also share these attributes. That is different from attributes like, for example, God's necessity or self-existence, which we do not share.

These attributes are communicable to us because we are made in God's image and are, therefore, personal. If you remember our diagram [see the outline], we made a differentiation between God as infinite and then man as finite, yet both God and man are personal. Insofar as God is infinite, man is utterly unlike God; but insofar as God is a personal being, man is like God in virtue of being personal. With respect to personhood, there is a chasm that separates man from the rest of creation, such as animals, plants, and inorganic material; but man finds himself on the same side of the divide as God insofar as he is a personal being made in the image of God.

We want to look at those attributes that God has in virtue of his being a personal being. The first of these is *incorporeality*, which is the property of being without a body. Let's look first at some of the scriptural data concerning this attribute.

Scriptural Data

First, the Scripture teaches that *God is spirit*. In John 4:24, Jesus is speaking and he says, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." So God is not a physical being. In contrast to material or physical reality, God is spirit.

Secondly, the Scripture teaches that *God is omnipresent*. Here I would simply refer you back to those passages that we looked at when we studied the omnipresence of God, his attribute of his being everywhere present. God is not a locally confined, physical object. He is not something that exists at a place in space. This fits right in with his incorporeality, his being spirit. So all of those verses that go to show God's omnipresence would be relevant here.

Thirdly, *God is indiscernible to the five senses*. 1 Timothy 6:16 speaks of God being inaccessible to the five senses: "who alone has immortality, and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion.

Amen.” You cannot see God; you cannot discern him with your five senses. Also, if you turn to 1 Timothy 1:17: “To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” God is invisible; you can’t see him nor (it is implied) can the other senses discern God because he is not a physical object.⁷⁰

Fourthly, *images of God are forbidden*. This is one of the central teachings of the Old Testament. Look, for example, at Exodus 20:4-5a, the first commandment:

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 to them or serve them. . . .

So we are not to make any sort of pictorial, or physical, representation of God. To do so would be to misrepresent God, since God is not a physical object. Also Deuteronomy 4:15b-16: “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.” We are not to portray God as being some sort of a man in the sky with a long white beard. To do so denigrates God and does not capture what he is really like. We are to make no images of God.

Fifthly, on the other hand, however, *in the Scripture God is described in bodily terms*. Look in Psalms 18:6-10 for an example of this:

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.

There God is described in bodily terms – it refers to the ears and the feet and the nostrils of God. Although we have been told that God is not a physical object but is spirit, still we have these descriptions of him in bodily terms.

Finally, the last point is that *the Scripture also includes visions of God in corporeal terms*. Exodus 33:20-23 is one of the most famous of these – Moses’ vision of God. This is where Moses asks to see God’s face, and God says to him,

“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 a vision of God is described in corporeal terms.

So we have mixed data concerning the incorporeality of God. The question is, how do we

⁷⁰ 5:05

make sense of this?⁷¹

DISCUSSION

Question: On the first Bible verse that you used, John 4:24: What does that mean, that we are to “worship in spirit,” or is that off the subject?

Answer: That is off the subject, but what Jesus is speaking of there would probably be not simply going through *pro forma*, physical rituals. He didn’t think that the Samaritans, for example, had the right worship of God (he was talking to the Samaritan woman), but he thought the Jews did. He is talking about worshiping God in a true way, in a properly spiritual disposition. But that is not the main point here, which is that God is not a physical being.

Question: Couldn’t God just let people see him with a human form even if he doesn’t really have one?

Answer: I will say something more about this when we get to our systematic summary, but I think you are on the right track in saying that these are not actually visions of God himself, the way he actually is.

Question: Are you going to comment on what you believe with iconography, icons and images?

Answer: I was not going to; but I have to say that there I have deep reservations about the use of imagery in Eastern Orthodox worship of God. I understand the theory of the icons, I have friends who are Greek Orthodox, and understand how the icon itself is not worshiped; it is merely a “window,” so to speak, to the transcendent, through which you look to see God. Nevertheless, it does seem to me that if we take these commands that we read in Deuteronomy and Exodus seriously, these images are inappropriate, especially images of the Trinity. And, moreover, I think that they are spiritually damaging to the laity, who do not understand this and who tend to pray to these physical objects. I think we have this sadly, too, in Roman Catholic churches where you have imagery, statues, and so forth. I take a fairly strong line in saying that the use of these sorts of images are inappropriate and can be very misleading to lay people. I can appreciate the art of Michelangelo. I love to see the beauty of the art. But how damaging has it been to Christianity, this image of God as an old man with a long, white beard! It has been so destructive to the proper concept of God. People view God as a sort of Santa Claus in the sky who is “keeping a list, checking it twice, and is going to find out if you are naughty or nice.” That does not exalt God. J. I. Packer makes this point very well in his book *Knowing God*, where he says that the problem with images is that nothing can capture the true glory and magnificence of God, so any image is going to leave aspects of God’s being and nature unrepresented. Therefore, it will ultimately diminish who God is and our concept of him.

Question: We talk about God being spirit, and I wanted to go over exactly what a “spirit being” is. I struggle with the concept that it is immaterial but it has power. Can you

⁷¹ 9:46

expand on that?

Answer: I will say something more about that when we get to the systematic summary. What does it mean to say that God is spirit? Clearly, it *does* mean that he is not a physical being. But as the question indicates, to say that he is spirit does *not* mean he is some kind of wraith, or an ethereal and impotent entity. On the contrary, the Spirit of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is the power of God – surging, dynamic, and creative. So we shouldn't think that incorporeality implies some kind of impotence.⁷²

[Q & A: A comment in which the audience member just provides his own interpretation to the passages of Scripture that Dr. Craig mentioned earlier regarding "the face" or "the hand" of God. Dr. Craig answers that this is jumping ahead and that this is the kind of direction he is going to go next.]

Systematic Summary

What we want to say, in affirming God's incorporeality, is that God is not of the order of matter. He is not a material being or object. Rather he is of the order of mind. Just as we are a union of mind and body, God is a pure mind without a body. By a mind, I obviously don't mean a brain – a brain is a physical organ that sits in your skull. By a mind, I mean a self-conscious, mental entity. It is not physical.

Let me give you an illustration from Sir John Eccles, who won the Nobel prize in physiology and medicine. He wrote a book, *The Self and Its Brain*, with Sir Karl Popper, the great philosopher of science. I heard Eccles lecture once when I was in Germany in Dusseldorf at the World Congress of Philosophy. He compared the relationship of the mind to the brain with that of the connection between a pianist and a piano. He said that just as the pianist uses the piano as an instrument to make music, so the mind uses the brain as an instrument to think. If the piano is damaged or out of tune, the musician, though he knows the music, will not be able to produce beautiful music because the instrument is damaged. Similarly, if the brain is damaged, then the mind or the soul will not be able to think clearly or may not even be conscious because its instrument of thought is impaired.⁷³ Eccles believes that the brain serves to store information and that the mind then scans the brain for this information and uses it as a tool for thought. What Eccles' analogy suggests is that God is like a pure mind without a body; he doesn't need a body as an instrument for thought. Rather God is a self-consciousness without a body.

The qualification one would make here is that God is an infinite self-consciousness. We have seen that God is omniscient, that he knows all things. So this is an infinite intelligence – an infinite mind – without a body. That is what it means to say that God is spirit.

This infinite, unembodied mind created the universe – he created space and time, matter and energy. He created man in his image as his representative here on this planet. Man, as the image of God, therefore bears the same sort of properties of God as being a personal being. Man also has a spiritual or mental element to his being that enables him to know

⁷² 15:34

⁷³ 20:01

God and to be in communion with him. We are not just physical bodies. Rather we are body-soul composites. We have a soul or a mind which is distinct from the body but intimately united with the body during this lifetime. This enables us to be in communion with God as person to person.

How, then, should we understand the bodily descriptions of God in the Scriptures? I would say, in contrast to the Mormon view, which takes them literally and is very naive – which would lead to a self-contradictory portrait of God –, that these bodily descriptions of God are clearly metaphorical. Why do I say this? There are two reasons.

1. They serve a clear literary purpose in the text. For example, in the *New Bible Dictionary* article on “Face,” it tells us that “the face” of a person became synonymous in Hebrew with his presence. So to speak of someone’s face is to speak of the presence of that person. It also says that, metaphorically, determination could be shown by “setting one’s face” – denoting unswerving purpose. So to say, “He set his face” didn’t mean he went and put on makeup! It meant he was determined in his purpose. Determined opposition was made, it says, 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 “His face fell.” When we say that someone’s face fell, we don’t mean that literally. It means that he was disappointed or in some way saddened. But we don’t mean that literally his face somehow slid off of his head!

These bodily descriptions serve a clear literary purpose. The “arm of the Lord” speaks of God’s power. His “ear being open to prayer” speaks of God’s attentiveness. The “eyes of the Lord” watching over all the Earth speak of his omniscience and his awareness of everything that is happening. When you read these in their context, it is very clear that these serve a clear literary purpose.

2. If you were to take them literally, then they would be inconsistent because God is described in inconsistent ways. God would turn out to be a winged, fire-breathing monster, if you take all of these descriptions of God as literal.

It is very clear that these bodily descriptions of God, contrary to the way Mormons understand them, are meant to be taken as metaphors for other various attributes of God.⁷⁴

Finally, what about the visions of God, like the one described in Exodus 33 – Moses’ vision? What I would like to suggest is that these visions of God are not literal, visual sightings. These are not caused by photons bouncing off of an object, impinging on the retina, and stimulating the optic nerve so that you see the object. You do not see God in the way that you see a physical object like a chair or a table. This isn’t caused by photons bouncing off the object and then hitting your eyes. Rather these are mental images which are caused by God.

They are different from a hallucination. In a hallucination, like seeing a mirage, for example, this is manufactured by your own brain. It is a mental image that you yourself concoct, either through mental illness or some sort of stimulus or something of that sort. But a vision of God is something that God causes you to project, to see a mental image of. This is not to be taken as some sort of a literal, physical object that you see out there.

⁷⁴ 24:57

These visions should not be thought of as actual seeings of God as he is. Rather these are mental projections caused by God. They serve the purpose of showing forth, for example, God's holiness, or God's glory. The point regarding Moses in Exodus 33 is that no one could fully discern God's terrible holiness and live. You would be annihilated; but God gives to Moses a diminished grasp of his glory and holiness that Moses can bear to appreciate.

That would be how I would understand the incorporeality of God. God is an infinite mind without a body, and the scriptural passages that describe God or portray God in bodily terms are not literal but metaphors that serve a literary purpose.

DISCUSSION

Question: Are you using “mind” and “soul” as synonymous, and, if so, is spirit the same thing?

Answer: I am using them as synonymous, and I am not distinguishing between soul and spirit here. Sometimes people do want to distinguish between soul and spirit. I would tend to think the distinction would be a functional one – that you are alive in virtue of your soul, and “spirit” would speak of you in relation to God. But I do not think that there is any need to say that we are actually composed of three distinct parts – a soul, a spirit, and a body. Rather I think dualism is enough – we are composed of body and soul, and the soul in functioning toward God is sometimes referred to as spirit. It has to do more with its functioning than the way we are constituted.

Question: Where Abraham is visited by the two angels and God – is that supposed to be a Christophany? Because that wasn't a hallucination, would that be a projected image?

Answer: It could be. But there it may be suggested that God actually assumes a sort of corporeal representation of himself as one of the men with these angels. It is hard to know because we just are not given an explanation of that. Some have said it is the preincarnate Christ, but I think that is probably reading back into the narrative from the New Testament. An ancient Jew would have read that and said this is just the presence of the Lord that was there and was somehow manifested in a corporeal form. But we shouldn't think that we are actually seeing God. It would be more as if God would make a kind of image or something that would represent him there.

Question: You used 1 Timothy 6:16, about the unapproachable light. Would that light be the light formed in Genesis 1:3?

Answer: I had not connected them in that way before.⁷⁵ The light that is spoken of in Genesis is the light of creation. But this light in which God is said to dwell is meant to be a kind of expression of the way God himself is. Again, I would take it to be metaphorical. God isn't literally photons or radiation. Light and darkness are often used in Scripture as spiritual metaphors to express God in contrast to evil, pure goodness in contrast to evil, holiness versus wickedness. So the “light” and “dark” expressions I take to be metaphorical. God isn't literally light beams that could be reflected off of a mirror.

⁷⁵ 30:00

Question: The Old Testament mentions several times about God's dwelling place, in the Holy of Holies. Can you talk about that?

Answer: It does seem that in the Old Testament God's presence was specially manifested in the Holy of Holies just as, in our world today, God's presence is especially manifested in his people, in his church. We are indwelt with the Holy Spirit of God. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, correlated to the way God indwelt the physical temple. But we shouldn't think, as we said when we looked at omnipresence, that God was confined in any way to the temple. Solomon himself recognized that. It would just be a particular manifestation of his glory there.

Question: [initially goes into an interpretation of his own, unrelated to the subject or question]. . . You said God is personal but to an infinite degree. Are you saying that the church, through Christ, is personal and there is no end to it?

Answer: I was not thinking of duration; I was thinking of God's omniscience. This is a person that possesses infinite intelligence and infinite power. Therefore, he is not like a finite person. He has these similar attributes that we do as persons, like intellect and will and self-consciousness, but in God's case they are all unlimited, whereas in our case they are finite and limited.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Total Running Time: 33:38 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 12

Personal – Intellectual: Omniscience

Application of Incorporeality

To recall the big picture, we have been looking at the attributes of God. We have discussed the infinite attributes of God, and then we began to discuss the personal attributes of God. The first of those we have been looking at is God's incorporeality, that is to say, God's being a spiritual, immaterial being, rather than a physical, extended being. We argued that God is best understood as an infinite, unembodied mind and that we, as finite minds, are created in his image, even though we are embodied in this physical world. I want to close this section by drawing out three applications from God's incorporeality.

First of all, it means that *that which is ultimate is not material in nature*. The ultimate reality is spiritual in nature, not material. That is to say, persons are the locus of value, whether these be the divine persons of the Trinity or human persons created in God's image. Persons are the locus of value. Therefore, one single person is worth more than all of the material universe combined. Think of that! That means that you, as an individual person, are worth more than the entire material universe in God's economy! Things have value only insofar as they serve the purposes of persons, only insofar as they are useful to persons. Therefore, as St. Augustine said, we should love people and use things, not vice-versa. Of course, the two great commandments that Jesus reiterated point to this. The first of these is to love the Lord our God with all our strength and with all our soul and with all our heart and with all our mind, and the second to love our neighbor as ourselves. These two great commandments capture what is of ultimate value in the universe – namely persons.

Second, it means that *we should have a spiritual focus in our lives and not a material focus*. Since the greatest and most important realities in life are immaterial or spiritual, that ought to be our focus. Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 6:19-21, in the Sermon on the Mount:

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.

So many of us are preoccupied with amassing material wealth and material goods, a fine house, a big car, fancy clothes; and yet in the end, these are trivialities compared to the spiritual concerns that we ought to have. I remember a remark by the author C.P. Snow that the most horrible thing that can happen, he said, would not be worldwide famine. The most horrible thing that could happen would be worldwide famine and we in the West would sit and watch it on our televisions! It is that disproportion between the

incredible wealth that we have here and the poverty of so many people in the world that, I think, ought to move us to be concerned about their lot. We ought not to be hoarding up material things for ourselves; we ought to be thinking about how we can use our wealth and our material goods for the benefit of others and for the advancement of God's Kingdom in this world.

Finally, it also means that *our most important needs are spiritual, not physical*. Our most important needs are not the needs of our bodies but the needs of our souls. Therefore, we need to attend closely to these. Look at what Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:7b-8:

discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.⁷⁷

Bodily training is useful for this life, but this life is short and transitory. Godliness is valuable, not only for this life, but also for eternal, everlasting life and is therefore something that we should exercise ourselves to develop. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 9:25: "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." Paul thinks of the Olympic athletes that train so vigorously for the sports in which they compete. They do it for just a perishable crown, an olive garland in those days. But Paul says that we are striving for an imperishable crown of righteousness that the Lord will give us on that day when we go to be with him. Think of how much time we lavish on our bodies – exercising, working out, women's making up their faces, getting your hair done, the clothes that we wear, how we look. And yet how much time and effort and concern do we lavish on the care of our souls? – our bodies, beautiful and pampered, but our souls undernourished and flabby and ugly! Our most important needs are spiritual, not physical, and therefore we need to train ourselves like an athlete in developing godliness in our lives. This will carry over for the life to come. There is an important application of this attribute of God's incorporeality because it shows us that the ultimate things in life are spiritual and not material.

As spirit, as self-conscious mind, God possesses all of the attributes of personhood to an infinite degree. He possesses intellectual attributes, volitional attributes, and emotional attributes. We want to turn now to a discussion of those.

Personal – Intellectual: Omniscience

First, God's intellectual attributes can be described under the heading of his omniscience. Omniscience, from the Latin, means literally "all knowledge." "*Omni*" is "all" and "*science*" is "knowledge." Let's look at the scriptural data with respect to God's omniscience.

Scriptural Data

Before looking at specific facets of it, I want to read Psalm 139:1-6 because this is such a wonderful summary of the omniscience of God:

O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

⁷⁷ 5:27

You understand my thought from afar.
 You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
 And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.
 Even before there is a word on my tongue,
 Behold, O LORD, You know it all.
 You have enclosed me behind and before,
 And laid Your hand upon me.
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 It is too high, I cannot attain to it.

Here the psalmist extols God for his infinite knowledge of all things and especially God's intimate knowledge of the psalmist himself. In fact, when we look more closely at what the Scripture has to teach about God's omniscience, we find that God does indeed know all things.

First of all, the Scriptures indicate that *God knows everything that happens*. He knows everything that is going on in the universe. Let's look at some Scriptures. Job 28:24: "For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens." Here God is described as looking down from heaven and seeing everything that transpires on the face of the Earth.⁷⁸ Similarly, two chapters later in Job 31:4, Job asks, "Does not he see my ways and number all my steps?" Of course, the answer is, yes, God knows every step that Job might take. He numbers all his steps and knows all his ways. Then over in Job 34:21-23:

For His eyes are upon the ways of a man,
 And He sees all his steps.
 There is no darkness or deep shadow
 Where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.
 For He does not need to consider a man further,
 That he should go before God in judgment.

God knows all things as he looks down from heaven, and he sees all things that transpire on the Earth. Proverbs 15:3 emphasizes this same truth, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good." In the New Testament, Jesus similarly taught this. Matthew 10:29-31: "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. For the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore, do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows." Here Jesus says that God knows even the very hairs of our head and that even the little sparrow that falls to the ground does not do so without God's knowledge. Literally everything that happens in the universe is known by God.

Secondly, not only does God see and know everything that happens in the world, but *he also knows the secret thoughts of each individual*. In other words, God literally reads your mind – he knows what you are thinking. 1 Chronicles 28:9 speaks of this truth. This is David's charge to Solomon. David says, "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts." God searches our

⁷⁸ 10:03

hearts and understands the intent of every thought. The heart, in Hebrew terminology, was conceived to be the center of the human personality, the very essence of a human person. Over and over again, the Old Testament describes the hearts of men as open to God like a book to be read by him. For example, in Psalm 44:21, the LORD “knows the secrets of the heart.” Similarly, in Jeremiah 17:9-10:

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.”

God knows the heart of every person and reads his thoughts. In the New Testament we find this same truth reiterated in a very graphic manner in Hebrews 4:13: “there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” There is no secret thought, no inner recess of our minds, no hidden corner of our hearts that isn’t open and transparent to God.⁷⁹ He not only knows all that is happening in the universe, but he knows the very secret thoughts of every individual.

Thirdly, even more startling still, the Scriptures affirm that *God knows the future*. He knows what has not yet happened but will happen. Go back to Psalm 139:4 and 139:14b-16:

Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. . . Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your 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 says that even before he thinks a thought or says a word, God already knows of it in advance and, in fact, while he was still being formed in his mother’s womb, God knew and counted all of the days that the psalmist would live from his birth until his death.

Isaiah also has a strong emphasis upon God’s foreknowledge of the future. In fact, for Isaiah, the characteristic earmark of the true God in contrast to the pagan false gods of Israel’s neighbors was God’s foreknowledge of the future. Isaiah 41:21-24:

“Present your case,” the LORD says. “Bring forward your strong arguments,” The King of Jacob says. Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; as for the former events, declare what they were, that we may consider them and know their outcome. Or announce to us what is coming; declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods; indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together. Behold, you are of no account, and your work amounts to nothing; he who chooses you is an abomination.

Here, Isaiah flings in the teeth of these pagan deities the challenge to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the future is so that we might know that you are a true god! And,

⁷⁹ 15:23

he says, they are nothing; these idols are an abomination and can tell us nothing about what is to come. Similarly, in Isaiah 46:10: “[Yahweh] declares the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all my good pleasure’” In contrast to the idols and pagan deities of Israel’s neighbors, Yahweh, the true God, was known by his foreknowledge of the future. So God knows the future.

Finally, the Scriptures also affirm that *God cannot learn anything*. He already knows everything. Therefore, it is impossible for God to learn anything. Romans 11:33-36:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became his counselor? Or who has first given to him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

There is no one who can teach God anything. Similarly, in Job 21:22: “Can anyone teach God knowledge, in that he judges those on high?” The question is merely rhetorical; no one can teach God knowledge. Indeed, in Job 37:16, God is declared to be perfect in knowledge. Psalm 147:5 sums it up: “Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; his understanding is infinite.” That says it all. God’s understanding is infinite; he is infinite; he is perfect in knowledge.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Total Running Time: 21:26 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 13

Omniscience Defined

Systematic Summary

We are now going to turn to our lesson on divine omniscience. We are going to look at a systematic summary of the divine attribute of omniscience and the biblical material concerning divine omniscience.

Omniscience Defined

Omniscience is usually defined in terms of truth. For any true statement or any true proposition, God knows and believes that proposition and he does not believe any false proposition – that is the definition of omniscience. God’s being omniscient means that God believes and knows every true proposition and does not believe any false proposition or statement. Omniscience is defined in terms of God’s propositional knowledge: he knows only and all true propositions. That means he knows the past, he knows the present, and he knows the future because there are true propositions in the past tense, present tense, and future tense. God knows every truth. Even before the creation of the world, God knew every motion of every single electron that would ever occur in the universe. He knows your very thoughts before you even think them; he knows our free choices before we make them. God has all propositional knowledge.

But even omniscience doesn’t exhaust the scope and excellence of God’s knowledge. Philosophers have noted that in addition to propositional knowledge, there is also a kind of non-propositional knowledge, a knowledge that doesn’t involve knowledge of a true proposition. Let me give an illustration.

Suppose I am out hiking in the Canadian wilderness, and I am chased by a ferocious moose and have to scramble up a tree to escape. Suppose I yell to Joe, “Go tell Jan that I have been treed by a moose!” What will Joe do? Will he run up to Jan and say, “Help, I’ve been treed by a moose!”? No, that is what I told him to say, but that isn’t what he will report. He will run up and say, “Help, *Bill* has been treed by a moose!” In other words, Joe and I use different words to express the same proposition. When I say “Tell her *I* have been treed by a moose,” that is the same propositional content as the sentence Joe uses, which is, “*Bill* has been treed by a moose.” So we have different sentences and different words, but we have the same propositional knowledge. When I know *I* have been treed by a moose, I have the same propositional knowledge that Joe has when he knows *Bill* has been treed by a moose.

And yet, despite the fact that we have the same propositional knowledge, our knowledge isn’t identical. It is not entirely the same. How can we tell this? Because if I believe, “*I* have been treed by a moose,” how will I react to that knowledge? Well, I will react by hanging on for dear life! I know I have been treed by a moose, so I am going to hang on in desperation. But how does Joe react to that knowledge? He doesn’t hang on for dear

life in response to the knowledge that Bill has been treed by a moose. In response to his knowledge of that proposition, he runs off to get help.⁸¹ So what that implies is that even though he and I have the same propositional knowledge – we both know the same true proposition – nevertheless we have a kind of non-propositional self-knowledge that is different. When I know the proposition *Bill has been treed by a moose*, I hang on for dear life. When Joe knows that proposition, he runs for help because we have a different self-knowledge in this case.

This sort of non-propositional self-knowledge is essential to action. For example, to give a different illustration, it is not enough for me to know the proposition *Bill is hungry* in order for me to be motivated to go get something to eat. For suppose that I am in the hospital suffering from an accident and I have amnesia and I have forgotten that I am Bill. And suppose somebody informs me, “Bill is hungry.” Well, that wouldn’t do anything to motivate me to eat because I do not know that I am Bill. Knowing that Bill is hungry wouldn’t do anything to cause me to ring for food. Thus, what I need in addition to the knowledge that *Bill is hungry* is this self-knowledge, “I am Bill.” It is only when I have that self-knowledge that my response to the propositional knowledge *Bill is hungry* will be that I will try to get something to eat.

This self-knowledge, this non-propositional knowledge of one’s self as one’s self, is essential to timely action. If there were something that had all propositional knowledge – imagine you had a supercomputer that you could program into it all true propositions – but suppose this computer lacked self-knowledge. It would be impossible for it to take any sort of timely action because it wouldn’t know itself as itself, even though it had all this propositional knowledge programmed into it. What that means is that God is *more than omniscient*. He not only has all propositional knowledge, but he also has appropriate self-knowledge as well. He knows not only that God is omnipotent, but he knows that “I am God” and therefore “I am omnipotent” expressed from his vantage point. So God’s cognitive excellence exceeds even omniscience. He has all propositional knowledge, has no false beliefs, and he also has appropriate self-knowledge.

Even so, the excellence of God’s knowledge is still not yet fully exhausted! What is important here is also *the way* in which one acquires one’s knowledge. Suppose we imagine that there are two beings, and each one of them had all propositional knowledge, and suppose that each one of them had appropriate self-knowledge. Nevertheless, suppose that one of them acquired his knowledge only because the other one had taught it to him. The other one told him everything that he knew, and that’s why the second being has all the propositional knowledge that he does, only because the first one told him. Clearly, the second being would not be as cognitively excellent as the first being, who didn’t have to be taught. The one who only learned, or acquired, the knowledge by being taught would be less excellent cognitively than the first being which was untaught. The first being doesn’t learn anything from anyone – he has his knowledge innately. Similarly, God simply knows all truths innately. He is maximally excellent intellectually. He has all propositional knowledge, holds no false beliefs, has appropriate self-knowledge, and he does so innately without learning it or acquiring it from anyone. This is a quite startling conclusion when you think about it – that God’s cognitive excellence exceeds even

⁸¹ 5:01

omniscience!⁸²

DISCUSSION

Question: On the example of *Bill has been treed by a moose*, why don't you and Joe both have the same knowledge that Bill has been treed by the moose? You grasping the tree and him running off – isn't that just a new proposition, that being what you need to do about it?

Answer: I don't think it is a new proposition. Certainly there is a difference between the proposition *Bill has been treed by a moose* and the proposition *Bill should hang on* and the proposition *Joe should go for help*. Those are different propositions that an omniscient being would need to know. But knowing that *Bill should hang on* won't prompt me to hang on for dear life unless I know, "I am Bill." So there has to be this self-knowledge that supplements whatever propositional knowledge you have in order for you to act in an appropriate way.

Question: It seems what you are getting at is that there are different perspectives on the same propositional knowledge.

Answer: That would be one way to think about it. In other words, one's self represents a different sort of perspective on the propositional knowledge. Sometimes philosophers will say that I grasp this propositional knowledge in a first-person way and somebody else grasps that knowledge in a third-person way, so that the way we differ is how we grasp it. I think that is right, and what that yields is this kind of non-propositional knowledge.

Followup: Can you go from there and say God not only knows these propositions from his perspective but he also knows them from others' perspectives?

Answer: Certainly God would know how it would look from somebody else's perspective. Indeed, I think *we* know that in the example I described. But God doesn't have the self-knowledge that, say, Napoleon does, in that God doesn't believe that he is Napoleon. God doesn't believe that he is Ronald Reagan. God knows that he is God. That is why I said that what God possesses is appropriate self-knowledge. To have all self-knowledge would be a cognitive dysfunction, not an excellence. God would be literally schizophrenic and would hold false beliefs if God thought that he were Ronald Reagan or Napoleon.⁸³

Question: The *impact* to you versus Joe in the moose analogy is different.

Answer: That is one way of expressing it. They have a different impact, so this differing impact cannot come from the propositional content of what is known because that content is the same. So where does this different impact arise from? There must be a component of knowledge which is non-propositional, which is the argument I am trying to make.

Question: It sounded like you were defining omniscience and then beyond omniscience God has additional knowledge. I find that a little confusing because I have been trained to

⁸² 9:41

⁸³ 12:44

think of the prefix “omni” as “all.” So, why couldn’t we just include that in his omniscience?

Answer: When omniscience is traditionally defined, it is defined in terms of all propositional knowledge. God has all of it. So there aren’t any more propositions that could be known than God already knows. In that sense, it is truly *omni*. It is not that self-knowledge gives you additional propositional knowledge. This is a different kind of knowledge. Defining omniscience is usually done in terms of truth – that God knows only and all truths. But there are also other kinds of knowing than just knowing truths. That is the point.⁸⁴

Question: You hit on the idea of a problem presented by atheists that say omniscience includes first-person knowledge so therefore that makes him have first-person experiential knowledge of torturing someone (*i.e.* the knowledge of a person who is a torturer). This introduces immorality in God. Can you comment on this further?

Answer: What this question does is introduce some technical vocabulary in the discussion. There are certain types of words in English that are called indexical words – they are expressive of different perspectives. One type of indexicals would be personal indexicals, which are indexed to the person. Those would be words like “I,” “you,” “he,” and so forth. That is what we’ve been talking about with respect to God’s self-knowledge. There are also what are called temporal indexicals. These would be words that are indexed to, or from the perspective of, the present time. These are such words as “now,” “today,” “tomorrow,” “yesterday,” “in three years time,” “four years ago.” All of those are indexed to the present. Then there are words that are spatial indexicals. Those would be words that express perspectives like “here” and “there,” “three miles north of here.” Those would be indexed to spatial locations.

The question that arises is the kind of knowledge that one has by virtue of having these sorts of indexical beliefs like, “I have been treed by a moose.” What I am suggesting is that, at least with respect to these personal indexicals, these do not belong to the propositional content of a sentence. Otherwise, it would be impossible for Joe to ever go tell Jan that I have been treed by a moose. He could not convey that information to her because if he runs up to her and says “I have been treed by a moose!” she would look at him and say, “No, you’re not! You’re standing right here!” But if he said, “Bill has been treed by a moose!” then the personal indexical (“I”) is gone. So that information would be literally incommunicable if these personal indexical terms were part of the propositional content of the sentence. I think that what we want to say is what I have said, that the propositional content is neutral with respect to these indexicals and, therefore, communicable. But in addition to the propositional knowledge, there is something more of a non-propositional knowledge that *I* know when I know what I would express using one of these indexical terms. The case for spatial and temporal indexicals may be somewhat different, but I don’t think we need to get into that right now. But this is a very interesting feature of language that does come to bear in discussion of divine omniscience and what God knows.

Question: I don’t get indexicals. What exactly are they? What do they do?

⁸⁴ 14:51

Answer: They are words. They express a truth from a particular perspective. That is the idea. They are indexed to perspectives, or they are tied to perspectives. So when the proposition *Bill Craig has been treed by a moose* is expressed from my perspective, it is expressed linguistically as, “I have been treed by a moose.” But if Joe is looking at me up there, he might express that same proposition with different words, such as, “You have been treed by a moose!” It would be the same propositional content, that is to say, the same information content, but the linguistic expression of that content is different. We use different words because these words express different perspectives.⁸⁵

Question: Is it correct that only God is omniscient?

Answer: Yes. It is right to say that God is the only omniscient being.

Followup: What is the point of adding to the definition of “omniscient,” if those things are not already included?

Answer: If God is already omniscient, then why add more? I would say that (1) from a Christian point of view, it magnifies the greatness of God. When I first saw this, my breath was taken away! Because I thought, God is *more* than omniscient? This is when philosophy expresses itself in worship and awe of God. My worship of God is deeper because of my philosophical studies, not in spite of them. When you see insights into Christian doctrine like this, it elicits praise to God for his greatness. (2) A second reason is that some atheists have offered misconceived arguments against divine omniscience by saying things like, “God can’t know that ‘I am Napoleon’,” or “God can’t know that ‘I hurt my back lifting weights’.” He can know *Bill hurt his back*, but God can’t know, “I hurt my back.” So they have said, “Aha! God can’t be omniscient!” and you see sophomoric arguments to try to defeat God’s being omniscient. The answer is that omniscience means all propositional knowledge, and God does have that. But it would be a cognitive imperfection for God to know, “I hurt my back lifting weights” because he didn’t. He knows *Bill hurt his back lifting weights*. So for both theology as well as apologetics, I think there is great value in analyzing these attributes carefully and seeing what is really implied in them.

Question: Earlier you mentioned how God doesn’t have everybody’s self-knowledge, just his own. But does he have a sort of higher self-knowledge? For example, he doesn’t know, “I am Napoleon,” but he knows what Napoleon is thinking when Napoleon thinks, “I am Napoleon.”

Answer: I would prefer to just call it self-knowledge and say that God has appropriate self-knowledge. But I would try to capture what you are rightly expressing, and that is that God is perfectly empathetic. He empathizes with how we feel and knows how we feel. He does know that, for example, being a sinner feels guilty and lousy and miserable. But he himself doesn’t feel guilty and lousy and miserable because he is not a sinner. But he does know how sinners feel. I want to agree with you that God certainly has perfect empathy with us, but I would want to stick with what I have said about the distinctions in saying that he doesn’t have the knowledge, “I am Napoleon.”

Followup: Do you think that having that capacity for empathy would in any way influence his actions from a self-knowledge perspective? For example, if he knows that

⁸⁵ 20:05

my falling down the stairs is going to make me feel bad, and he knows how that is going to feel, would he at any point intervene to stop me from falling down the stairs, so he would not have to feel that pain himself?

Answer: Biblically speaking, (except for the last part) that seems to be perfectly correct. God, over and over again in the Scriptures, says, “I am compassionate,” and compassion means literally “suffer along with.” I would think that being a compassionate God, he would act in appropriate ways to not allow needless pain and suffering in the lives of his creatures (though not in order to avoid feeling pain himself). God will providentially order the world in such a way that his ultimate goals will be achieved through the pain and the suffering that we experience.⁸⁶

Question: With respect to Hezekiah and how Isaiah says God told him Hezekiah was going to die, but later says God gave him a reprieve and let him live another 15 years. Why did God tell Hezekiah he was going to die, if he knew he was going to change his mind?

Answer: There is no way to actually answer that question because there is no way to read God’s mind! But it is conceivable that this was a test of Hezekiah’s faith. Think of Jonah. Jonah was sent to Nineveh to say, “In 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed!” When the people repented, God said, “All right, I won’t destroy you.” Sometimes what we have in the Scriptures is not really *foreknowledge* of the future; they are *forewarnings* of what will happen *unless* something else happens. One analogy I like is in the story *A Christmas Carol*, where Scrooge is confronted with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, who shows him horrible scenes of Tiny Tim’s death and Scrooge’s own death and lonely demise. Scrooge says to the spirit, “Are these shadows of things that *will* be, or are they shadows of things that *may* be only?” And the spirit doesn’t answer him! Why? Why doesn’t the spirit answer him? If he had said that these aren’t really going to happen in the future (because the spirit knows Scrooge is going to repent), then Scrooge might not have repented. On the other hand, if the spirit said that these are only things that might happen, then Scrooge might say, “Well, *anything* might happen! That’s no big deal. I *might* sell my business and become a flower marketer; that *might* happen! But why worry about it?” So the spirit doesn’t say anything to Scrooge because he knows that by giving him this forewarning, Scrooge is going to repent and change. So in dealing with human beings, like the people of Nineveh or maybe Hezekiah, God could say things to them by way of forewarning to test or motivate a certain reaction in them. That is within his sovereign discretion to do that.

Question: In 1 Samuel 15:29, Samuel says to Saul that God doesn’t change his mind.

Answer: That is the difficulty. In Samuel it says, in one translation, that God does not repent or change his mind. But then there are other Scriptures where it explicitly says, “It repented God that he had made man.”⁸⁷ So there is at least a face value contradiction that one needs to explain. And I would explain it in the way I just attempted to do.

Followup: (inaudible)

⁸⁶ 25:05

⁸⁷ “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” (Genesis 6:6, King James Version).

Answer: Fair enough – I think you are quite right; that word can often mean, “It grieved God,” and that he experienced grief that, for example, he had made man. But it doesn’t mean he wanted to change his mind. That is a fair point, too.

Question: Is that an example of middle knowledge? Knowing that how a person will react when you put them in that situation?

Answer: That is exactly right! In both the Nineveh case and in the example of Scrooge, what God is telling these people is that this is what *would* happen if they were not to repent. Sometimes that is made explicit in Scripture. There is a prophecy to Zephaniah, I think, or maybe from Zechariah – one of those Z-guys – where he says, “If you do this, then this is what is going to happen; and if you do that, then this is what is going to happen.” It is clearly a kind of conditional prophesy of that sort, where God has middle knowledge of what would happen under different circumstances.⁸⁸ The Open Theist interprets this to show that God doesn’t know the future and therefore can change his mind. But the problem is that that butts up against so many other passages in Scripture that indicate that God does know the future, does know what is going to happen, that I think that alternative just doesn’t make sense ultimately of all the data.

Question: Last week we talked about how God can’t learn anything, but can you comment on that in relation to how God is in time from creation, thus “now” changes and there is a definitive “now” on the A-Theory of time?

Answer: On a dynamic theory of time, where temporal becoming is real – things come into being and go out of being – if God is, as I argued, in time, then he does experience this temporal becoming of events. So when I said that God doesn’t learn anything, I was referring to God’s propositional knowledge’s not changing. His propositional knowledge is not changing, but certainly he can experience things in a way that would require different linguistic expressions of that proposition he knows. For example, he knows, “Christopher Columbus *will* discover America in 1492.” He knew that in, say, 1200. In 1492, he knows, “Christopher Columbus *is* discovering America.” Later on he knows, “Christopher Columbus *did* discover America in 1492.” My point is that he hasn’t acquired new propositional knowledge in having that transition take place. These are just different linguistic expressions of these indexical beliefs, so that God doesn’t really learn anything new. But certainly his experience is fresh and changing as he experiences temporal becoming.

Followup: How is that compatible with Molinism, where you have God knowing how you are going to freely react to everything?

Answer: This does segue into the next section. I am going to talk about two problems. The first of which is divine foreknowledge and human freedom. If God really does know everything in advance – he knows what you are going to think before you think it and he knows your free decisions before you make them – , then since God cannot be wrong, how can you really be free to do anything differently than what he foreknows you are going to do? That is the discussion we will take up next.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ 30:05

⁸⁹ Total Running Time: 33:25 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 14

Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

We have been talking about divine omniscience, and we come now to two problems raised by the subject of divine omniscience. The first one is *the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom*. The difficulty here is, if God knows everything in advance that is going to happen, then that means that he knows every free choice that you are going to make. But, if that is true, then isn't everything fated to occur? If God knows in advance, for example, that Peter will deny Christ three times, as Jesus predicted he would, then when the time comes around, isn't it necessary that Peter deny Christ three times? Since God cannot be mistaken and God has already predicted and foreknows that Peter will deny Christ three times, then it follows that Peter must deny Christ three times. In other words, divine foreknowledge of the future is said to lead to fatalism – that everything that happens happens necessarily. Everything is fated to occur.

Some Christian theologians have actually agreed with this point of view. Martin Luther, for example, thought that simply in virtue of God's foreknowing everything that will happen, everything was fated to occur and would happen necessarily. These theologians equate divine foreknowledge with divine foreordination. If he foreknows it, then in virtue of foreknowing it, it is foreordained and therefore must come to pass. Thus, even the fall of man, on this view, would be something that was foreordained, since God knew in advance that Adam and Eve would fall into sin. It follows that they were fated to fall into sin necessarily, and therefore the fall of man was foreordained as well as foreknown.

This argument for theological fatalism is a mistaken argument – it is a fallacious argument. Here's basically how the argument goes:

1. Necessarily, if God foreknows X, then X will happen (where X can be any sort of event that you want to imagine in the future).
2. God foreknows X (God foreknows everything that is going to happen, so he foreknows X will happen).
3. Therefore, necessarily, X will happen.

But if X happens necessarily, then that means that everything is fated to occur and therefore there is no freedom.

This argument for theological fatalism is fallacious. Before I explain why, I would like to make a general observation. This argument has *got* to be fallacious because fatalism posits a constraint upon human freedom which is completely unintelligible. God's knowledge is not thought to be the *cause* of what will happen in the future. The claim is not that God's knowing about something causes that something to happen. The event

itself may be entirely uncaused – it could be a free event or it could be some quantum event that is completely causally indeterminate. The fatalist is not saying that God’s foreknowledge of some event is the cause of the event. But in that case, if the event is causally indeterminate, then how can God’s knowing about it in advance constrain it in any way?

Imagine that X is some uncaused event in the future.⁹⁰ We are to think, apparently, according to the fatalist, that if God knows about it in advance, then somehow X, even though it is causally undetermined, is going necessarily to occur. It is constrained to occur. But now suppose God doesn’t know about X. Let’s imagine God does not have foreknowledge about X. What has changed? X is still the same uncaused event, God doesn’t know about it, and now all of a sudden the constraint is supposed to have vanished. It happens contingently. It doesn’t happen necessarily. But whether God knows about it or not is just causally irrelevant to whether X occurs. What is this mysterious constraint called “fate” that God’s knowledge puts upon the event? I can’t see that there is any sort of constraint. The argument itself has to be fallacious because fatalism posits a constraint upon events which is completely unintelligible, being non-causal in nature.

And in fact this argument, as it stands, is fallacious. It commits a fallacy in modal logic. Modal logic is the logic of necessity and possibility. You see that that is what is operative in this argument: “*Necessarily*, if God knows that X will happen, then X will happen.” Then the second premise: “God foreknows X.” And then (3): “*Necessarily*, X will happen.” This has the logical form:

1. Necessarily, P implies Q.
2. P.
3. Therefore, necessarily Q.

The problem is: this commits a fallacy in modal logic. From the two premises (1) and (2), it doesn’t follow that (3) is true. That is just fallacious. What does follow from premises (1) and (2)? All that follows from “Necessarily, if God foreknows X, then X will happen” and “God foreknows X” is: “X will happen.” But it doesn’t follow that “X will necessarily happen.” Thinking so commits a fallacy in modal logic. So from the fact of God’s foreknowing X, it follows that X will happen but *not* that X will happen necessarily. X could fail to happen, and if it were to fail to happen, then God’s foreknowledge would have been different. The argument as it stands commits a fallacy in modal reasoning.

DISCUSSION

Question: Can you explain modal logic?

Answer: Modal logic is the logic of possibility and necessity – having to do with what is possible and what is necessarily true.

Question: When you say that it would have happened differently if God foreknew it

⁹⁰ 4:59

differently, is that in any way a confirmation of the B-Theory of time, where tenses are just illusions?

Answer: No, I don't think this is dependent on your theory of time. Whether you think that all events in time are equally real or you think only present events in time are real is irrelevant to this fallacy. The argument is just modally fallacious, and if X were not to happen, then God would not have foreknown it. He would foreknow something else. What we want to say is that though God's knowledge is *chronologically* prior to the event foreknown, the event foreknown is *logically* prior to God's knowledge. First God foreknows it, then the event happens. So God's knowledge is chronologically prior to the event. But the event is logically prior to God's foreknowledge. Whichever way the event goes, God's foreknowledge will follow it. If X happens, then God will foreknow that X will happen. If X were to fail to happen, then God will foreknow that X will fail to happen. God's knowledge is sort of like an infallible barometer. An infallible barometer will tell you with infallible correctness which way the weather will be. But the barometer doesn't determine the weather; the weather determines the barometer. From the barometer's reading, you can know how the weather will be, but the barometer won't determine the weather, it is the other way around. Such is the case with foreknowledge, too. It is X that is logically prior to what God knows. It is not that what God knows is logically prior to X. What God knows is only chronologically prior to X.⁹¹

Question: In regard to Calvinism, it seems they are looking at God as the Maker, Manufacturer – it would be like planned obsolescence or something that is built long enough to last for the length of its assigned mission. So divine omniscience is paired with this divine Manufacturing aspect that makes things happen in the future. Can you comment?

Answer: That's absolutely correct. The strong Calvinist does not say that foreknowledge equals foreordination. The Calvinist does not say just because God foreknows an event, therefore that event is foreordained to happen. Rather what the Calvinist says is that foreknowledge is *the result* of foreordination. It is because God makes it happen that he foreknows that it will happen. So the Calvinist bases foreknowledge on God's causal foreordination of events. God is the one who is the cause of everything that happens in the world – he has decreed what will happen – and that is how he knows it will happen. The Calvinist is not a fatalist. Fatalism posits a constraint on human freedom which is non-causal and therefore unintelligible. There is no such thing as "fate." But the Calvinist isn't guilty of that because the Calvinist *does* posit a causal constraint on what happens in the world – namely, God is the Manufacturer, God is the cause of everything that happens. That is how he knows it will happen. I think we can set the Calvinist view aside for now. We can talk about that when we come to the doctrine of providence and how it is that God causally interacts with the world. What we are dealing with here is not the Calvinist; we are dealing with that person who is a theological fatalist, who thinks that if God foreknows everything that will happen, that just in virtue of knowing about it, there is some kind of mysterious constraint that makes everything happen the way God foreknows it.

Question: About Joseph saying, "You intended it for evil, but God intended it for good" –

⁹¹ 10:50

seems to me that it validates the B-Theory of time. He is not necessarily looking forward, he is outside of time and he knows everything I am going to do, even though he doesn't control my actions or cause me to do things.

Answer: What this points out is that some people would try to escape theological fatalism by denying that God literally foreknows things. Namely, God is timeless, beyond time, and so he doesn't literally know about things in advance – that would presuppose that God is in time.⁹² But if God is timeless, then God doesn't literally *foreknow* things, and therefore premise (2) (“God foreknows X”) is literally false, because he doesn't really foreknow anything. I do not think that that really gets around the argument because even if it is true that God is timeless, you can still generate an argument for theological fatalism by saying something like, “It is now true that God timelessly knows that Peter will deny Christ three times. If it is now true that God timelessly knows that Peter will deny Christ three times, then necessarily Peter will deny Christ three times.” You can't get around it just by putting God outside of time. Indeed, if God is outside of time and knows that Peter will deny Christ three times, and a person in advance of that event knows that that is true, then it looks as if Peter's decision is just as fated as it would be if God's knowledge were in time. I don't think that postulating divine timelessness really gets at the heart of the problem. The real heart of the problem is this logical fallacy that this argument makes.

Question: In modal logic, what do you mean by “necessity”?

Answer: Let me give you some examples of necessary truths. “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” is necessarily true. “It is wrong to torture a child for fun” is a necessary truth. “If it is raining, then it is raining” is necessarily true. “If something has a shape, it has a size” seems to be a necessary truth. There are all kinds of truths that aren't just contingently true but seem to be necessarily true. The statement “It is raining” is not necessarily true – that is contingent because sometimes it is not raining – but the tautology, “If it is raining, then it is raining” is necessarily true. That just says “If P, then P.” Tautologies are necessarily true. There are things that are true that, by definition, are necessarily true. “If Jones is a bachelor, then Jones is unmarried.” By the definition of what a bachelor is, it follows that that is necessarily true. What the argument does is it posits a necessary truth, namely, “Necessarily if God foreknows X, then X will happen” – that is necessarily true – and then a contingent truth, namely, “God foreknows X.” Then it infers from that a necessary truth: “Therefore, necessarily X will happen.” That commits a fallacy – you cannot infer a necessary truth from these two premises. All you can infer is the contingent truth that “X will happen.”

Question: An argument you might give someone who holds this view is I might foreknow a football team is going to lose 100-to-0 and it happens. What about that foreknowledge caused that to happen? It doesn't seem like it does. The only retort to that I could see is that the knowledge was only 99.99% sure, but not sure with 100% certainty.

Answer: Certainty is simply a property of persons. It is not a property of propositions. Propositions are either necessary or contingent. But it is people that are certain. So whether you have certain knowledge is just a psychological state; it is not a property of

⁹² 15:04

the proposition itself. So you are right – your illustration shows the point that merely knowing the outcome of the game doesn't do anything to make it happen. That is my point about this fatalism's just being unintelligible. The argument has to be wrong because the constraint that it postulates on events is unintelligible, being non-causal.

Let me make this addendum. Theological fatalists know this.⁹³ In the literature they are well aware of this. So what they try to do is to amend the argument to make the second premise necessarily true: "Necessarily, God foreknows X." From that, then it does follow logically and correctly that "Therefore, necessarily X will happen."

But then the question is, "Wait a minute! Why think now that the second premise is true because it doesn't seem that it is necessary that God foreknows X? He could know something else instead of X – he could know that not-X will occur instead." What the theological fatalist will say is, "The necessity that I am talking about is not logical necessity. It is the necessity of the past." We have a grasp of this when we say, "Don't cry over spilled milk" or "That is water under the bridge!" There is a sort of sense that the past is necessary and it is *that* sense in which it is necessary that God foreknows X because God has known about it from all eternity. The problem is that no philosopher has ever been able to give an adequate explanation of what this peculiar type of necessity is on which it turns out that God's foreknowledge is temporally necessary. In the most adequate accounts that I have seen of this so-called temporal necessity, it turns out that God's foreknowledge is *not* temporally necessary, even though it is in the past. It is not true that necessarily God foreknew X. We have the ability to act in such a way that if we were to act differently, then God would have known differently, even though that knowledge is in the past. So although theological fatalists are aware of this logical mistake, their attempts to amend the argument and to make it valid have been unsuccessful. Nobody has ever been able to explain a sense of temporal necessity according to which God's beliefs about the future turn out to be temporally necessary.

[Q & A: Just asks Dr. Craig to redraw and reiterate the two arguments using modal logic symbols]

Question: Regarding Open Theism – that solves the problem by saying that God does not foreknow human actions. It attempts to preserve omniscience by saying that it is not possible to foreknow free actions before they are made. I know you have a dim view of Open Theism, but do you think that is a possible solution or does that forfeit orthodoxy?

Answer: I do not think that Open Theism does solve the problem. Let's understand what the Open Theist says. The Open Theist thinks that theological fatalism follows from divine foreknowledge. So he will deny premise (2), that God foreknows X. He says that it is not true that God must know everything in the future. So he offers a revisionist definition of omniscience. You'll recall we argued that if God is omniscient, then he must know all true propositions. That is what omniscience means – to believe and know only and all true propositions. But the Open Theist says, "No, to be omniscient is not to know all propositions. God only needs to know those propositions that it is logically possible to know. And it is not logically possible to know propositions about the future. Therefore it

⁹³ 19:57

is not an inhibition upon God's omniscience if he doesn't know these."⁹⁴

What you can show (which is what I try to do in my little booklet *What Does God Know?*) is that, even if you give the Open Theist his revised definition of omniscience (that is, God knows everything that it is logically possible to know), it turns out that it is still logically possible to know future contingent events like human choices. They are still logically possible to know; therefore, on their own definition, it turns out that God doesn't know everything that it is logically possible to know (since they say God doesn't know future events, even though future events are logically possible to know). It does represent an attenuation of omniscience that is unacceptable. It means that God is not a perfect being, that he is not omniscient – even on their own definition, which I don't accept anyway (because I think it is wrong). But even *given* their definition of omniscience, it is logically possible to know future propositions; therefore, it turns out that their view denies divine omniscience, which I take to be unacceptable because it means God is not a perfect being. I lay this out in more detail in the booklet *What Does God Know?* and also in the chapter on omniscience in *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*.

Question: [Asks if this relates to determinism. Does God deduce what is going to happen in the future based on the present?]

Answer: Clearly, it is not a deduction from what is present. If God deduces the future from what is present, that would lead to some kind of causal determinism. If his knowledge of the future is based on knowing, "Here is the present state of affairs and causes," then that would mean everything is causally determined to happen. The question of *how* God knows the future is a quite different question than the one we are concerned with here. What we are concerned with is just the idea that if God knows everything that will happen, then does everything happen necessarily? What I am suggesting is that there is no good reason to think that that is the case. Quite the contrary, things can happen however the causes (in this case, human free choices) want them to be, but whichever way they go, God will have foreknown that because the events are logically prior to what God foreknows, even though his knowledge is chronologically prior to the events.

Question: How does all of this tie into with the concept of prophecy? The example I am thinking of is if you take Jonah. Jonah intentionally went away from God's plan, but because God had foretold it, it almost necessarily came into being.

Answer: Actually, that is not true in the Jonah passages. We said earlier that Jonah was commanded to preach, "Yet 40 days, and Nineveh will be overthrown!" But what happened was they all repented, so the prophecy didn't come true. So, in fact, that is a case where just the opposite happened – where it seems that what God gave through Jonah was not foreknowledge of the future but just a forewarning about what would happen if they did not repent. A better example would be the one I gave, Jesus' prediction of Peter's denying him three times. This has very peculiar implications. What this means is, as Peter stood there in the courtyard of the high priest, he had the ability to do something such that, if he had done it, Jesus would not have made that prophecy. He doesn't have the ability to falsify Jesus' prophecy, because Jesus is infallible. But as he

⁹⁴ 25:06

stood there in the courtyard, he had the ability to do something, namely, affirm Christ, which was such that if he had done it, then it would never have been true that Jesus made that prophecy. So it is kind of like time travel. Foreknowledge and time travel are very similar to each other. The time traveler has the ability to do something such that, if he did it, the past would have been different. Similarly with foreknowledge, we have the ability to do things such that, if we were to do them, God would have foreknown differently and not given the prophecy – the prophecy would have been different. That is why I say the fatalist has never been able to enunciate the sense of the necessity of the past on which God's knowledge and prophecies turn out to be temporally necessary. They are like events that are dependent on the time traveler's activities. The time traveler has the ability to act in such a way that the past would have been different. Similarly, we have the ability to act in such a way that if we were to act that way, the past would have been different with respect to what God foreknows and possibly prophesied.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Total Running Time: 31:57 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 15

Middle Knowledge

We have been talking about divine omniscience and theological fatalism – whether or not everything happens necessarily because God foreknows everything that will happen. If God foreknows everything that is going to happen, then how can there be free will? How can you refrain from doing anything, if God already knows you are going to do it?

Fatalism is the view that everything that happens happens necessarily. Theological fatalism is the view that because God foreknows everything, everything happens necessarily. The argument for theological fatalism goes like this:

Let X be any event that you choose arbitrarily.

1. Necessarily, if God foreknows that X will happen, then X will happen. (That is in virtue of what knowledge is. Knowledge is justified true belief – it is what is true. So if God knows that X will happen, then X will happen.)
2. God foreknows that X will happen.
3. Therefore, necessarily, X will happen. (So X cannot be free – everything that happens happens necessarily.)

That is the argument for theological fatalism. What I pointed out last time is that this argument is logically invalid. That is to say, it breaks the rules of logic. All that follows from the two premises is:

- 3.* Therefore, X will happen (*not* “Necessarily, X will happen.”)

From the fact that God foreknows X will happen, you can be sure that X will happen. But it doesn't follow that it will happen necessarily. It could fail to happen, but it won't. If it were to fail to happen, then God wouldn't have foreknown X.

God's foreknowledge of the future is very much like a time machine. For an illustration, I'll use a scene in the time travel movie *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (this is my favorite time travel movie!). In it, Bill and Ted have this time traveling device that enables them to go back into the past. While they are back in the past, they get thrown into jail, and they say to each other, “How are we gonna get out? We're locked in!” One of them suddenly has an idea, “I know – we'll come back from the future, and we'll leave the keys here so we can open the cell and get out!” The other one says, “Great idea! Where will we put them?” “Over there under the wastebasket!” So they go over and look under the wastebasket, and sure enough, there are the keys where they left them when they returned from the future! From the fact that they find the keys under the wastebasket, you know that they will go back in time and leave them there. But does that mean that they will necessarily go back and leave them there? No, they could fail to go back and leave the keys. But if they were to fail to go back, then the keys would not have been there to be found. From the fact that the keys are under the wastebasket, you know

that they will go back in time and leave them there, but it doesn't mean that they don't do that freely. They can still freely refrain, but if they were to freely refrain, then the keys wouldn't have been there when they looked.

That is an illustration that I hope will convey to you this idea that we have the power to do X or not-X, and whichever one we do, God will foreknow. But his foreknowing it doesn't determine it or render it necessary.

DISCUSSION

Question: It seems that this would be compatible only on the B-Theory of time. If God is to know what is going to happen, then it seems there needs to be a fatalistic chain of events of cause and effects, so he knows if he causes something, everything will play out on an A-Theory of time. To know something is going to happen in the future – for him to know we actually will do something – it would seem to imply a B-Theory of time.⁹⁶

Answer: I think what you are asking is a quite different question than what we are addressing now. You are asking, *how* can God foreknow the future if these events are not causally determined by events in the present? That is a subsequent question we can take up in a minute. What we are asking here is simply, *if* he knows them, does that make everything fated to occur? I think you can see that that doesn't follow. So hold off on that question about how he foreknows the future. In fact, what I am going to say later might have some implications on that.

Question: On conclusion (3), is “necessarily” the word that you are tying to God causing X? If you took the word “necessarily” out, that would be a true statement, would it not?

Answer: That is (3*). If you remove the “necessarily,” that is true, that does follow from (1) and (2). But don't think the “necessarily” here is a causal necessity! Remember, I said last time that is the crazy thing about fatalism. Fatalism isn't saying everything is causally determined to happen. It posits a constraint upon human freedom which is completely unintelligible because it says X could be an uncaused event, totally indeterminate, and yet somehow it is constrained to happen just by God's knowing about it – which is unintelligible. The argument has got to be fallacious because fatalism posits a constraint on human freedom which is completely unintelligible.

Followup: That gives us a good excuse when we do something stupid.

Answer: Right, you can say it was the will of God or something like that. But the argument won't work.

Question: This is regarding human freedom. The Reformers would say that we are free to do whatever we want, but we only want to do what is bad. So when God changes our heart, that is the cause of us doing anything good.

Answer: Yes, this is different from that. Luther did believe that in virtue of God's foreknowing the future, everything was fated to occur. But that is not what Calvin thought. Calvin didn't think that just in virtue of God's knowing the future, everything

⁹⁶ 5:25

was fated to occur. Even if you believe that man is sinful and fallen and cannot do any good work, still we can say he has a variety of sins to choose among. He can choose various sins; so if X is some sinful act, we are not asserting that we have the capacity to do some good, but you have a choice of some sin to commit. I don't think that is really at the heart of the issue. The heart of the issue is whether in virtue of knowing about something, that something happens necessarily.

Followup: The issue to me is God causes good to happen.

Answer: That is not the subject here. Causal constraints are not the issue here. That will come up when we talk about providence and God's sovereignty. This is just an argument about God's *knowing* about it. You could adopt Calvin's position – and that is, in virtue of God's knowing about an event in advance, things aren't necessitated to happen; rather, in virtue of God's sovereignty and providence, God caused everything to happen. So Calvin is not a fatalist, but he is a determinist. You see the difference? Causal determinists think everything is caused to happen. Calvin wasn't a fatalist. He didn't think that just in virtue of God's knowing the future, everything was fated to happen.

Followup: When you say, "Man has the freedom to do whatever evil things he chooses," God also has the ability to stop that because he can change that person's heart at any moment. In that case, man doesn't really have the freedom he thinks, if God can cause him to change his evil ways.⁹⁷

Answer: Again, you are raising issues related to God's providence and his causal relation to the world, and that is not what this is about. This is about merely God's knowing the future. We are studying the doctrine of divine omniscience and the claim on the part of a group of people called "Open Theists," who are evangelicals but who deny God's foreknowledge of the future. They say that God gambles, that he doesn't know what is going to happen. This is a significant movement that is rending evangelical churches apart. It is a growing movement that we need to be alert to. But it is not about causal determinism. These people believe that if God foreknows things, then everything happens necessarily. Since they think we have freedom, they therefore deny God's foreknowledge, which denies God's omniscience, which denies God's perfection. This isn't some academic issue. I'm trying to explain why we are spending time on this. This is a vitally relevant issue in the church today – we must get straight our understanding of divine omniscience and foreknowledge.

A question was asked last week why we couldn't redefine omniscience in such a way that God's ignorance of future free acts doesn't mean he doesn't know everything. What if we define omniscience, not that God knows every truth, but that God knows every truth that it is logically possible to know? The Open Theist can say that God knows everything that is logically possible to know, but it is not logically possible to know the future free acts of men, and, therefore, this is not any infringement upon God's omniscience. God does know everything that is logically possible to know and that is how omniscience should be defined, according to the Open Theist.

⁹⁷ 10:07

The problem is, even on that mistaken definition of omniscience, God still turns out to be not omniscient. The argument that Open Theists give is the following.

Let P be any future-tense statement about some action, like “George will eat pizza for lunch on Saturday.”

The argument goes like this:

1. Not possibly (God foreknows P and P is contingently true). (To be contingently true is the opposite of being necessarily true. If P is a free act, then it is only contingently true that “George eats pizza on Saturday.” It is not necessarily true – we already saw that that is false; that is theological fatalism. There is no good reason to believe that it is not possible for God to foreknow P and for P to be contingently true. But let’s give them this premise; suppose it is true that it is not possible for God to foreknow P and P to be contingently true.)
2. P is contingently true.
3. Therefore, it is not possible for God to foreknow P.

If it is not possible for God to foreknow P and P be contingently true, then since P is contingently true, it is therefore not possible that God foreknows P. That is the argument to show that it is not possible for God to foreknow these future contingencies, so that doesn’t infringe his omniscience.

The problem is that this argument is also logically invalid. That is to say, it breaks the rules of logic. All that follows from the two premises is, “Therefore, God does not foreknow P.” It doesn’t follow that it is impossible for God to foreknow P. He *could* know P, but in this case it would just follow that he *doesn’t*. The argument doesn’t show, in fact, that it is not possible for God to foreknow P. Therefore, it would mean that if he doesn’t foreknow P, he is not omniscient because, if you remember, the revised definition says, “To be omniscient you have to know everything that it is logically possible to know,” and here we see it is not true that it is logically impossible for God to know P. It *is* possible for God to foreknow P.⁹⁸

That is just a little more information on the earlier question that shows that even if you revise the doctrine of omniscience (so that God only knows what is logically possible to know), it still turns out that he is not omniscient. This is because there are things that are logically possible to know, and he doesn’t know them. Therefore, he wouldn’t be omniscient even on that revised definition (which is itself inadequate).

I realize that this is complex, but I thought this question was an important one and needed to be addressed a little more deeply.

In conclusion to this section on divine foreknowledge and human freedom, I think we can say that there is no good reason to think that in virtue of God’s knowledge of the future, everything is fated to occur. God foreknows everything that is going to happen, he foreknows every true proposition, including future-tense propositions. And that is perfectly compatible with freedom and contingency.

⁹⁸ 15:06

DISCUSSION

Question: If God has foreknowledge of something, can that something not occur?

Answer: I would say that even though God has foreknowledge of something, it could fail to occur. Even though God foreknows X, X could fail to occur. But it won't. If it were to fail to occur, then he wouldn't know it.

Question: Is this as simple as a matter of timing? If I sit here and think about what you are going to say next, I might be able to have a good guess of what words you are going to use. But if I could really see the future, then I would know what words you would use but I wouldn't have affected them or directed them.

Answer: That is exactly right! That is why I say fatalism is just unintelligible – how can your knowing what words I am going to say have any effect on what I am going to say? Fatalism has got to be false because it posits a constraint that doesn't make any sense.

Question: You could say it could come about for some reason or some cause and therefore it would be true whether or not it is necessarily true or not.

Answer: I'm not sure I understand you; but what causes the event is irrelevant here. We are not talking about causal determinism. Why the event occurs in terms of its causes just doesn't matter.

Question: Conclusion (3*) is true. It would also be necessarily true also. It wouldn't preclude it.

Answer: It could be, but not in virtue of God's foreknowledge. It doesn't follow from God's foreknowledge that it will occur necessarily, which is what the fatalist says.

Question: So what you have so far is God knows everything, man still has free will, but doesn't the Scripture also say God causes everything?

Answer: That is what we are going to talk about when we get to the doctrine of providence. We will talk about that when we get to doctrine of providence and sovereignty. Here we are just talking about omniscience.

Question: Can you explain how this connects with how, for example, Jonah wrote his book and the events in it and how God foreknew those events.

Answer: What I would refer you to would be the first section of this class on the Doctrine of Revelation, where we looked at the doctrine of inspiration and where I talk about how God knows what every person would freely do in any set of circumstances he was in.⁹⁹ So knowing that the prophet or apostle was in a set of certain circumstances, God knew he would freely write the book of Romans or the book of Jonah, and so you can have a doctrine of inspiration of Scripture that doesn't imply a dictation theory of inspiration. That material was covered in that section of the class. This is helpful in talking about doctrine of inspiration.

Question: With respect to God's foreknowledge of events, are those events considered potential events? They aren't actual events right? The reason I am asking is related to the counting of infinite number of events and how that is related.

⁹⁹ 20:07

Answer: You are drawing in another issue here. Whether or not these future events known by God are actual or not is going to depend on your theory of time. Suppose you have a graph where time is the vertical axis and the Big Bang is at time 0 and the Big Crunch is at some time t^* in the future, where the universe collapses or ends. On a B-Theory of time, all events in time and space are equally real. So if we are in the middle time t , the events at $t + 1$ are actual on the B-Theory of time. They are real and actual. But if you are an A-Theory of time advocate, then you don't think that the future is real. It is merely potential. All that exists is what exists now. So events in the future that God foreknows will happen don't exist in any sense. In that sense you can say that the series of events is potentially infinite – it will go on forever without any end. But the future is not actually infinite because there really aren't any future events; they don't exist at all. So that is going to depend on which theory of time you adopt.

Followup: Couldn't the absurdity of counting up actually infinite number of events be used against counting the future potential events?

Answer: Only if they are real; and I don't think there are an actually infinite number of future events. Indeed, I don't think there are *any* future events. I don't think they exist at all. There aren't any future events. They don't exist. There will be events, but as they occur, they will be potentially infinite. They will go on and on forever. But in fact there are no future events on the A-Theory of time.

Middle Knowledge

Let's turn to the next section, which is the second problem raised by God's omniscience. That is the question of what I call God's "hypothetical knowledge." A lot of times people ask the question, "Why did God create the world, if he knew it would be such a mess and so bad?" Here we need to draw an important distinction in answering this question between God's *foreknowledge* and what we could call his *hypothetical knowledge*. God's foreknowledge is his knowledge of everything that *will* be. He knows what will happen. By contrast, his hypothetical knowledge is his knowledge of everything that *would* be under certain circumstances.

One of my favorite illustrations of this is the wonderful scene in Dickens' *Christmas Carol* when Scrooge is confronted by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. After seeing these horrifying scenes of Tiny Tim's death and his own death, Scrooge asks the spirit, "Are these shadows of things that *will* be, or shadows of things that *might* be only?"¹⁰⁰ And the spirit doesn't answer Scrooge. In fact, Scrooge was asking the wrong question. What the spirit was showing Scrooge was not shadows of things that will be. He wasn't showing him the actual future. We know from the end of the story that Tiny Tim did not die, that Scrooge reformed his life and learned to celebrate Christmas and keep it in his heart. So these weren't scenes of what will be. But neither was the spirit showing Scrooge merely scenes of what could be. Anything *could* happen. What he was showing Scrooge was what *would* happen *if* Scrooge were not to repent. He was showing Scrooge hypothetical knowledge of what would be the case if Scrooge were not to repent.

So when a person asks, "If God knew the world would be such a mess, why did he create

¹⁰⁰ 24:57

it?” he is not talking about God’s foreknowledge. If God knows that this is the way it will be, it is in a sense “too late” to do anything about that. The future by definition is what will be. So if God knows that it will be that way, then that’s the way it is going to be. Rather what the person is really asking is, did God have knowledge of the way of the course of events *would be* if he were to create it, so that he could say, “Oh, that looks like it’s going to be bad! I’m not going to do it; I’m going to refrain from creating the world?” This is hypothetical knowledge. What the person is really assuming is that God has hypothetical knowledge of the way the world would turn out if he were to create it in a certain way.

This is, in fact, a controversial issue. Not all theologians agree on this. Some theologians say that God doesn’t have this sort of hypothetical knowledge about what would happen if he were to create the world. He has foreknowledge of what will happen, but he doesn’t have hypothetical knowledge. If you take that view, that enables you to completely short circuit this question because God didn’t know how the world would turn out if he were to create it in a certain way. Therefore, he can’t be held responsible for the way the world turns out, the way he knows it will be. If God doesn’t have this kind of hypothetical knowledge, he can’t be held responsible for such a messed up world’s existing.

On the other hand, I think there are powerful theological reasons for thinking that God does have this sort of divine hypothetical knowledge. The Bible teaches divine sovereignty and providence over everything that happens in the world. On the Christian view, the world is not just some sort of a cosmic accident. Rather God planned the world down to its most minute detail. Everything that happens in the world happens either by God’s direct will or, at least, by his permission. This kind of providential planning of the world requires hypothetical knowledge on God’s part. God would need to know what every free creature would do under any circumstances in which God might create him. So by creating certain people in certain circumstances, God could bring it about that his ends are achieved through the free decisions of those people.

This sort of process would be unimaginably complex, when you think about it. Just think what would be involved in bringing about a single event in history, say, the Allied victory at D-Day. God would have to have all of the right people in all of the right places to freely make all of the right decisions, and, of course, that would depend on their parents and their education, their upbringing, and just a myriad of factors that soon become incomprehensible to a finite mind. Only an infinite mind could have the grasp of the complexity necessary in order to plan a world of free creatures by using this hypothetical knowledge.

This would solve the dilemma of divine sovereignty and human freedom. God is sovereign over the world in that he creates the people he wants in the circumstances he wants knowing how they would freely choose so that his ends are ultimately achieved through the free decisions of these people.¹⁰¹ So God is sovereign and yet people are free.

This sort of hypothetical knowledge has a technical name for it – it is called “middle knowledge” because it is in between God’s knowledge of everything that could be and his knowledge of everything that will be. It is his knowledge of everything that *would be*

¹⁰¹ 30:22

under any particular set of circumstances.

Suppose God does have this kind of middle knowledge. How might one answer the question, “Why did God create such a messed up world as the world that we have on our hands?” The answer might be that God’s options may be limited. That is to say, given that God wanted creatures to be free, it may be that they would have messed up any world that God could have created. In any world of free creatures, it is possible that those creatures would go wrong and introduce sin and corruption into that world. So for any world that is feasible for God that has this much good in it, there would also be this much suffering and evil in the world.

In every circumstance in which God creates a person, God’s will is that that person do the right thing – that he refrain from sin, that he do the morally right thing. But God knows that if he puts some people in certain circumstances they would sin, that they would not do the right thing. God, then, wills to permit that. He doesn’t want them to sin, but knowing that is how they will freely choose, he permits them to do so. But in his providence he so orders the world that, on balance, he creates a world in which there is much more good than evil in the world. And it is this world which will ultimately result in his final purpose’s being achieved, namely, a world in which there is a multitude of persons in heaven from every tribe and tongue and people and nation who come to know him and his salvation. Therefore, we can be confident that God’s choice of the world is the wisest choice. Despite the sufferings and inequities of this life, nevertheless it is under God’s sovereign direction. Thus, it will be a world in which, ultimately, multitudes of persons will be saved and come to know him and these evils and sufferings of the world were permitted only with this good end in mind.

What that means is that the onus is really on us – it is we who mess up the world by our own free choices and decisions. It is not God who is to blame for the world’s being the way it is; rather it is us. Therefore we need to turn to him for forgiveness and moral cleansing for the way we messed up the world in ways that he doesn’t want us to do.

DISCUSSION

Question: Under that logic, God created this world as being his wisest choice out of all possible worlds to make.

Answer: Yes, although that doesn’t mean there is a unique wisest choice. There could be a whole range of good choices that he could make.

Followup: I wanted to bring up the example about the whole idea that we are living in the best of all possible worlds that Voltaire ruthlessly attacks in his book.

Answer: This isn’t committed to that. There are lots of possible worlds that are better than this, but they may not be feasible for God to create because his options are limited by the free will of creatures. You could say maybe there is a world where there is a multitude of creatures who all freely never sin, never do any evil, and they all go to heaven. That would be a much better world than this one. But it is not feasible for God to create such a world because in any world of free creatures that he creates which has as much good as this one, there would also be this much evil and suffering. So I am not suggesting that

this is the best of all possible worlds by any means. It is a difference between a possible world and worlds that are feasible for God given human freedom.¹⁰²

Question: [makes a theological interpretation of why God used crucifixion as the method of Christ's death. And God created the world so "the good would be so good and wicked would be so wicked"]

Answer: One thing you raise that is a very profound theological question is "the good of Christ's atoning death." Some theologians have thought that the good of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross is a good which is so great that in fact a world in which horrible evil and sin exist is on balance actually better than a sinless world because the sinless world would not have this great good of the sacrificial atoning death of Christ and this tremendous passionate demonstration of the love of God. That is a very interesting point. Why think that a world without sin or evil is necessarily a better world than a world in which there is tremendous sin, wickedness, and evil but there is also this tremendous and overwhelming great good of the redemption that is in Christ? I think that is a very profound point to ponder. It may well be the case that this is a good that is so great that it justifies God's creating a world that is horribly messed up¹⁰³

¹⁰² 35:14

¹⁰³ Total Running Time: 38:34 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 16

Personal – Volitional: Omnipotence

Application of Omniscience

We have been thinking about the divine attribute of omniscience. We finally come to considering what difference this makes to our lives today. What application is there to our lives of this attribute of divine omniscience? Three things occur to me.

First of all, God's omniscience is a basis for total trust in God's guidance in your life. God, because he is all-knowing, never makes a mistake. He never changes his mind because of a lack of foresight. He never overlooks anything; nothing catches him by surprise. Therefore we can be fully confident in his guidance for our lives. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths." So based on God's being all-knowing and infallible, we can trust him to guide us, to direct our paths as we make our way through life. In fact, his way and his will for us are perfect. In Romans 12:1-2, Paul tells his readers that they should present their bodies as a living sacrifice, pleasing and acceptable to God, and to be transformed by the renewal of their minds. Why? He says, "so that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." That is the description of God's will for your life. It is good; it is acceptable, both to you and to the Lord; and it is perfect. That means that anything you do to try to improve upon God's will can only damage it. It is perfect, and you don't tamper with the perfect. So, on the basis of God's omniscience, we can trust him totally for his guidance in our lives, even when this takes us through deep waters and the valley of the shadow of death.

Secondly, it is also a source of comfort in God's knowledge of your heart. Often we find ourselves in situations where we may be unjustly accused of something. Or others misunderstand us and mistake our motives. They may malign us and speak evil of us, even though our intentions were good. In situations like this we can take comfort in the fact that God knows our heart. 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 the motives of your heart, even when others misunderstand and malign you. God understands when we fail. Psalms 103:13-14: "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." God knows that we are mere dust and fallible creatures, and so when we fail, he understands us. Also when our devotion seems low at times, God knows the truth. He knows our hearts. In John 21:17, Peter is confronted with the risen Christ, who asks him three times, "Peter, do you love me?" John records that Peter was hurt because Jesus asks him for the third time, "Do you love me," and Peter said, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." Even when our devotion seems low, when perhaps our lives aren't all that they

should be, God knows our hearts. He knows that we love him, and he understands. This is a source of comfort to us.

Finally, God's omniscience is a source of security in God's love. There is no new information about you that could affect God's love for you. There are no skeletons in your closet that he is unaware of. There is no future fall that you might commit that he doesn't already know in advance that might affect his love for you. God knows us entirely and thoroughly; he knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows us warts and all – he sees things in us that are so evil and fallen and depraved that we don't even recognize them ourselves. And yet he loves us unfailingly. He knows us thoroughly, and yet he loves us unfailingly.¹⁰⁴

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 at those times when we look at ourselves and think what spiritual failures we are and how we let the Lord down, God is greater than that, and his love is consistent. Therefore, that means that there is no need to try to hide from God. That is futile anyway; we have seen that God knows everything, even the secret motives of our hearts. Therefore, there is simply no point to try to hide from God and hide our failures and sins from him.

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul says, “Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.” God fully understands us and fully knows us, and thus in Galatians 4:9 Paul says, “You have come to know God, or rather, to be known by God.” It is God who truly and deeply knows us, even better than we know ourselves. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 8:3, Paul says, “If one loves God, then one is known by him.” God knows us thoroughly, and even when we fail and are sinful in our lives, God loves us unfailingly. Therefore, we can simply be open and honest with God about our failures – we can bring them to him and admit them.

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

There is simply no reason to hide from God. It is futile anyway! He loves us anyway, and therefore we have security in him and in his love and his knowledge of us. We can bring our failures openly to him, be delivered of our guilt, and have security in his love for us.

Those are three applications of God's being all-knowing or omniscient.

Personal – Volitional: Omnipotence

We now want to turn to the next set of attributes on our list of divine attributes. These would be God's *volitional* attributes. This is connected with God's will – what God wills

¹⁰⁴ 5:19

to accomplish. This is not simply what he *knows*, but what he *wills*. This is where the attribute of God's omnipotence, or his being almighty or all-powerful, belongs. We are going to talk now about divine omnipotence. In order to do so, we want to first look at an analysis of this attribute by looking at what the scriptural data are concerning God's omnipotence.

Scriptural Data

First, the Scriptures indicate that *God is almighty*. For example, Genesis 17:1 – this is where God appears to Abraham –: “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 in the Hebrew here is “El Shaddai.” This is one of the names of God in the Old Testament. “El Shaddai” means “God Almighty.” So the very name of God is connected with God's being almighty.

Also in the book of Revelation 19:6, we find God referred to in similar terms. This is the scene at 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.’” Here, again, God is called “God Almighty.” This is one of the names of God, both in the Old and New Testament.¹⁰⁵

God's almighty power in the Scriptures is manifested most clearly in his creation of the world. In creation, God creates the universe out of nothing. He isn't confronted with some sort of recalcitrant material substance – some sort of primordial matter – that he merely shapes into the world. Rather, God speaks the world into being out of nothing. No greater display of God's power could be imagined than his ability to create the universe from nothing. In fact, this would be plausibly considered to be maximal power. I can't imagine a power which would be greater than the ability to create from nothing.

This is found right at the beginning of the very first verse of the Bible. In Genesis 1:1 we read the familiar words, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” The psalmist reflects on this in Psalm 33:9, “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.” Here it describes God's creation by his word; he simply speaks the world into being.

Romans 4:17 also reflects on God's creation out of nothing. Here it speaks of Abraham as being called to be the father of many nations. Paul says this was “in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” So God, by his almighty word, calls into being out of nothing the entire universe and thus creates the universe. I think no greater demonstration of God's being almighty could be imagined than that.

Secondly, the Scripture also indicates in multiple places that *God can do all things*. For example, Genesis 18:14 is the promise that Sarah and Abraham will bear children in their old age. Sarah laughs at this promise. The Lord then says, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” He rebukes Sarah by implying that nothing is too hard for him. God can do it.

Jeremiah 32:17: “Ah Lord GOD! It is thou who hast made the heavens and the earth by

¹⁰⁵ 10:45

thy great power and by thy outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for thee.” In effect, Jeremiah answers the question the Lord posed to Sarah, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” No, says Jeremiah, nothing is too hard for the Lord – you are the God who made the entire universe by your great power.

Also take a look at Job 42:1-2, in which God appears to Job out of the whirlwind and demonstrates his great power over the universe: “Then Job answered the LORD: ‘I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted.’” On Job’s understanding, God can do all things.¹⁰⁶

Over in the New Testament, we have the same truth reaffirmed. In Matthew 19:26, Jesus is speaking about salvation, and the disciples are wondering if the rich cannot be saved, who can be saved? And Jesus said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Finally, in Mark 14:26 we find Jesus praying in the garden, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.” Here Jesus says all things are possible to his heavenly Father.

So over and over and in different ways, the Scriptures affirm that God can do all things.

That is the scriptural data that is pertinent to divine omnipotence. Let’s do a systematic summary now of this attribute in an attempt to understand it.

Systematic Summary

Paradoxes of Omnipotence

Immediately, when dealing with the subject of omnipotence, we confront the so-called paradoxes of omnipotence. We have all heard these. For example, if God is omnipotent, can he make a stone too heavy for him to lift? If he can make a stone too heavy for him to lift, then there is something he can’t do, namely, he can’t lift the stone. But if you say he can’t make a stone too heavy for him to lift, then there is something that he can’t do, namely, he can’t make such a stone. So the idea is that omnipotence is an inherently paradoxical idea. How should we understand, then, divine omnipotence in such a way as to avoid these paradoxes?

First, we need to ask ourselves, “Can God act in ways that are contrary to his own nature?” For example, could God create another God and fall down and worship him? Could God commit adultery? These are obviously not things that God could do. God cannot act contrary to his own nature. So such actions are usually exempted from divine omnipotence. To say that God is omnipotent or almighty doesn’t mean he can contradict his own nature.

What about logical impossibilities? Can God do things that are logically impossible? For example, could God make a square circle? Could God make a married bachelor? Could God bring it about that Jesus both came and died on the cross and that he did not come and die on the cross? Could God make a round triangle? These sorts of things are also usually exempted from God’s omnipotence. Most theologians – the vast, vast majority of

¹⁰⁶ 15:05

theologians – have not understood omnipotence to mean that God can do things that are logically impossible. Indeed, when you think about it, these really aren't things at all. There isn't any such thing as a married bachelor. There is no such thing as a round triangle. These are just combinations of words which, when put together, are incoherent combinations. They are just logical contradictions. Therefore, to say that God cannot do logical contradictions is not to say that there is some thing that God can't do because these aren't really things at all. Thus, to say that God can't bring about a logical contradiction is not really to inhibit God's omnipotence at all.

Having said that, there is one notable exception to this understanding of divine omnipotence. The French philosopher Rene Descartes thought that God could do that which is logically impossible. Descartes thought that God could bring it about that there are married bachelors or round squares if he wanted to. But the vast majority of Christian theologians have disagreed with Descartes on this and have not thought that God's omnipotence means he can do logical impossibilities.¹⁰⁷

In fact, Descartes' view is demonstrably incoherent. It is self-referentially incoherent. That is to say, it refutes itself; it pulls the rug out from under its own feet; it saws off the limb on which it is sitting. Descartes' view is often called "universal possibilism." This would be the view that all things are possible. There are no necessary truths. For example, it is not necessarily true that a square has four sides. God could have made it so that a square is round, and yet it would be a square. It is not necessarily true that a bachelor is an unmarried man. God could have made married bachelors. In effect, this theory says there are no necessary truths. But think about that for a moment – what about that statement itself? "There are no necessary truths." Is that necessarily true? If it is necessarily true, then it contradicts itself – it refutes itself because then there is at least one necessary truth, namely, that there are no necessary truths. So this cannot be necessarily true. But if it is not necessarily true, then that means that it is possible that there are necessary truths, that there is a possible world in which God has created necessary truths. But if it is possible that there are necessary truths, then there must actually be necessary truths because to say that there is a possible world in which there are necessary truths means that there is a possible world in which all worlds have this true statement in them. So it turns out that if it is even possible that there are necessary truths, then there must actually be necessary truths. So the statement actually turns out to refute itself. Therefore, I think Descartes' position is simply incoherent. To say that God can do logical impossibilities is simply self-refuting and incoherent. To say that God is omnipotent doesn't mean he can bring about logical contradictions.

Finally, what about what we might call "actual impossibilities?" Could there be things that are logically possible in and of themselves but they are actually impossible to bring about? For example, it is logically possible that human beings would always choose to do the right things – sin is not necessary. In any moral situation in which free agents find themselves, it is possible for them to choose to do the right thing and not to sin. What that means is that there must be a logically possible world in which no one sins, a logically possible world of free creatures in which everybody does the right thing. Therefore, this would be a sinless world. But does that mean that it is therefore within God's power to

¹⁰⁷ 20:06

actualize this world – in other words, to bring about this logically possible sinless world? Not necessarily. As we saw last time, God’s omnipotence is restricted by what hypothetical statements are true about the way free agents would act. Given human beings’ freedom to choose for and against God, it may be the case that there is no feasible world that God could create in which human beings always choose to do the right thing to bring about a sinless world. Given man’s freedom, God cannot determine unilaterally which possible world will result.

Philosophers usually distinguish two types of worlds. Possible worlds would be worlds that are logically possible in and of themselves. But worlds which are logically possible in and of themselves but are such that God could not bring them about are referred to as “infeasible worlds.” There is a difference between possible worlds and feasible worlds to God.

To give an example, suppose God knew that if Peter were to be created in precisely those circumstances in which he was created, he would freely deny Christ three times.¹⁰⁸ That is the way Peter would freely act. It is not logically necessary that Peter deny Christ three times; there is a logically possible world in which Peter is precisely in those circumstances and yet he affirms Christ three times. But that is just not the way Peter would freely choose. If Peter were in those circumstances, then he would deny Christ freely three times. Given that that is the way Peter would freely choose in those circumstances, that means that a logically possible world in which Peter freely affirms Christ three times in those same circumstances is not feasible for God. God could certainly *make* Peter choose Christ three times in those circumstances, but then it would not be a free action on Peter’s part. Given that God wants Peter to decide freely to affirm or deny Christ, that possible world in which Peter freely affirms Christ in those circumstances is not feasible for God.

It is logically impossible to *make* someone *freely* do something. We are not positing any non-logical constraint upon God’s omnipotence here. It is logically impossible to make someone freely do something. That is as logically impossible as making a round square or married bachelor. But the difference is that in this case there are possible worlds in which Peter freely affirms Christ three times; but they are just not feasible because Peter would freely choose to deny Christ three times in those circumstances. Thus, there are certain things which in and of themselves are intrinsically logically possible but which are not actualizable by God. Therefore God’s omnipotence should not be taken to comprise these as well.

Omnipotence Defined

How can we define divine omnipotence then? Here is a rough and ready definition of what omnipotence means. It means that God is able to bring about any state of affairs which it is logically possible for anyone in that situation to bring about. God can bring about any state of affairs which is logically possible for anyone to bring about in that situation. What this would imply is that God cannot do things that are logically impossible. God cannot act contrary to his nature or bring about infeasible worlds. But he can bring about any state of affairs in which it is logically possible for someone in his

¹⁰⁸ 25:19

situation to bring about.

Application

What application does this attribute have to our lives? Let me mention three things.

First of all, it means that you are a walking stick of dynamite! For God's power which created the universe out of nothing is at work in you. The same almighty Creator God who spoke the world into being lives and works in you. 2 Corinthians 4:6-10 says,

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," 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, 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.

Here Paul says that it is the same God who said, "Let there be light!" who has shone in our hearts to give the knowledge of God in the face of Christ. This transcendent power is at work within us. Despite all of the afflictions and troubles of this life, God's transcendent power can be manifested in us.¹⁰⁹

Ephesians 1:19-21 contains a wonderful promise. Paul prays that we 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;

Here Paul says the same resurrection power that brought Jesus to life again is at work in our bodies.

Over in Ephesians 3:20-21, Paul gives this doxology which, for Jan and me, has been very meaningful in our personal lives. This is our theme verse in a way – on the back of my watch that Jan gave me, she had this reference engraved:

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.

Here Paul says that it is the almighty God who is at work within us to do far more abundantly than all that we can ask or even think through his unimaginable power.

So, in Christ, we have tremendous power. This is something of a paradox. Jesus says in John 15:5, "Apart from me, you can do nothing." Apart from him we are powerless. We can do nothing. But Paul says in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!" So apart from Christ we are powerless and impotent and can do nothing; but in Christ we can do all things through his indwelling power. Jan and I have found in our own lives over and over again how God is faithful to his promises and how

¹⁰⁹ 29:55

he can do miracles through ordinary people, if we will simply trust him and believe him for great things. Sometimes God doesn't always open doors of opportunity for us. Sometimes we have to knock down the doors! We can do this through the power of God and the power of Christ that is at work within us.

Secondly, God's omnipotence means that nothing can defeat God's purposes for you. Ephesians 1:11 says, "In him [Christ], according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will." There it says that God accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will. Matthew 16:18, Jesus speaking to Peter, says: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." The powers of hell and Satan cannot prevail against God's church and against his purposes. If God wants something for you, then he will bring it to pass in your life. You will get it, as long as you trust him.

Think again of Joseph. Joseph's life was punctuated by failure and disaster – sold into slavery, cast into prison through an unjust accusation – and yet God was at work in Joseph's life to bring about a powerful result that Joseph could never have imagined.

Having said that, I want to be very clear that failure does not always mean that somehow you are out of God's will, that somehow you haven't trusted in God's power. Failure can be part of God's will for your life. God can accomplish things in your life through failure that he could not accomplish through success. I am not saying that a life that is built upon Christ and filled with his Holy Spirit will be a life without failure. Not at all! But I am saying that nothing can defeat God's purposes for your life. If he wants you to achieve something, if he has something in store for your life, there is nothing that can defeat God's purpose's being actualized in your life.

Finally, third, God's omnipotence means that God is adequate to all your needs. There is no prayer too hard, no need that is too great, there is no temptation that is too strong, there is no misery that is too deep – God is adequate to meet our needs in those situations. God, through his omnipotent power that is at work within us, is going to be adequate to all our needs in life. That is why we need to found our lives firmly upon him, upon the solid rock.

I want to conclude this lesson with Paul's words 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.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Total Running Time: 36:21 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 17

Paradoxes and Application of Omnipotence

[Note: Due to technical difficulties with the recording equipment, a previously recorded lecture is provided for this lecture. A lesson on Divine Omnipotence is taught again here with variations from the previous Lecture 16.]

The Scripture teaches both that God is almighty and that God can do all things. Indeed, one of the names of God in the Old Testament is “El Shaddai,” or God Almighty. Let’s do a systematic summary of this attribute and see how we should understand God’s being omnipotent or all-powerful.

Systematic Summary

Paradoxes of Omnipotence

This raises immediately certain paradoxes of omnipotence that you have probably heard of. For example, does God’s being all-powerful mean that God can act contrary to his own nature? Can God contradict his own nature because he is all-powerful? Specifically, could God, for example, make another God (an idol, let’s say) and fall down and worship it? It seems inconceivable that God could engage in so blasphemous an activity as worshipping some other God. Could God commit adultery? Again, that seems impossible because that would be contrary to the essence of God. He is essentially holy and morally perfect and therefore cannot sin. So omnipotence should not be taken to mean that God can act contrary to his own nature. He cannot act against his own essence, which includes things like moral perfection. That would not be encompassed within omnipotence.

But what about logical impossibilities? For example, people will often ask if God can make a stone too heavy for him to lift. If he is all-powerful, shouldn’t God be able to make a stone that is so heavy that he is unable to lift it? If you say, “No, he can lift anything!” then that means there is something he can’t do – which is make such a stone. This is a logical impossibility. Could God bring it about that Jesus both died on the cross and did not die on the cross? That again seems logically inconceivable – that is a logical contradiction. Can God make a round square or a married bachelor? Those sorts of logical impossibilities are typically exempted from omnipotence. Omnipotence doesn’t mean the ability to do things that are logically impossible.

Indeed, something that is logically impossible isn’t really a thing at all, when you think about it. It is not as though there is some “thing” that God can’t do. Those are just contradictory combinations of words, and there is no such thing as a round square or a stone too heavy for God to lift. This is not an infringement of his omnipotence, as it is typically understood.

The one exception to this would be the French philosopher Rene Descartes. He thought

that God could do that which is logically impossible. Descartes thought that God could bring it about that there are married bachelors or a four-sided triangle. But Descartes is almost alone in this. It seems that logical impossibilities really do not represent things at all, and therefore they are not things that God should be expected to do in virtue of being omnipotent.

Can God do the unactualizable? It is hard to find a word for this. We could call this the metaphysically impossible – something that is logically possible but is unactualizable. It is metaphysically impossible. Can God do something that is unactualizable? For example, it is logically possible that every person in the world always chooses to do the right thing. So it is logically possible that there be an absolutely sinless world, which is a world populated by people with freedom of the will who just always freely do the right thing. Sin is not logically necessary, so there is a logically possible world in which no sin exists and everyone freely chooses to do the right thing. Such a world would not be a puppet world; it would be a world of genuinely free creatures, but they would just always freely choose the right thing.¹¹¹ So it would be logically possible that there be a sinless world. But maybe God cannot actualize such a world. Maybe, given man's freedom, such a world is not within God's power to actualize because if God tried to create such a world, the creatures would freely go wrong. It would be possible for them to always do the right thing, but maybe they wouldn't cooperate. Given that God grants them genuine freedom, God cannot guarantee how they will use that freedom. Therefore, there may be worlds that are logically possible in and of themselves but are not actualizable for God given human freedom. Of course, God could intervene and force them to do the right thing, but then they would not be acting freely – they would be puppets. Thus, things that are unactualizable would also not be within the scope of God's ability.

Omnipotence Defined

How, then, should we understand omnipotence? One of the insights of modern philosophy of religion, in dealing with the subject of omnipotence, is the realization that we shouldn't think of omnipotence in terms of quantity of power or of specific tasks. Rather we should think of omnipotence in terms of the ability to actualize states of affairs. A state of affairs is just a way something might be – for example, the state of affairs of there being chairs in this room, or the state of affairs of our being in the lower story of the church building, or there being a piano here. Those are all states of affairs that actually obtain. Omnipotence should be understood in terms of the ability to actualize states of affairs. To be omnipotent means the ability to bring about any state of affairs which is logically possible for any one in that situation to bring about. A person with that kind of power is omnipotent.

How does this apply to some of these paradoxes of omnipotence? No one can actualize a state of affairs which consists of an all-powerful being's inability to lift a stone. That is impossible. No one can actualize the state of affairs of an omnipotent being's being incapable of lifting a stone. So that would mean that omnipotence would not require God to be able to create a stone too heavy for him to lift. That would not fall within the scope of omnipotence.

¹¹¹ 5:02

No one can actualize the state of affairs of a morally perfect being's sinning. It is logically impossible for a morally perfect being to sin. So no one can actualize the state of affairs of a morally perfect being's committing a sin. So that would not fall within the scope of omnipotence.

It seems that this definition of omnipotence is adequate to capture the intuitive idea of being all-powerful, and yet it won't commit you to saying that God can do these absurdities like worship another God or make a stone too heavy for him to lift or make a round square and things of that sort. To be omnipotent is to be able to bring about any state of affairs which is logically possible for anyone in that situation to bring about.

DISCUSSION

Question: Did Descartes give any examples of the logical inconsistencies that could come about?

Answer: Yes, he used the example of a triangle. That was actually his example. He thought that God could bring it about that a Euclidean triangle would exist whose angles did not add up to 180 degrees. He thought that the laws of logic and mathematics were simply, in a sense, chosen by God arbitrarily and that God established these laws and that he could have set up just any sort of laws of logic and mathematics.¹¹² Sometimes this view is called "universal possibilism" by contemporary philosophers because it means that literally anything is possible, that God could have set up things so that anything is possible. That would mean that there is a possible world in which God does not exist and yet God created everything other than himself, which is just mad. How can there be a possible world in which God doesn't exist and yet he created everything? Yet Descartes' view commits you to that kind of absurdity.

Followup: Doesn't that mean definitions go out the window? The concept of a triangle, for example. If God can change a triangle, then it isn't a triangle.

Answer: Exactly! That is what is so crazy about trying to grasp this view. It is literally incomprehensible. But Descartes would say that it is simply because we have been created by God with these sorts of mathematical laws that we do find it inconceivable for triangles' angles not to add up to 180 degrees. He thinks that is just a limitation of our finitude because God created us in this way. But it really is quite inconceivable; it is incomprehensible – he would even admit that.

Question: Can you comment on the omnipotence of God in relation to the "begottenness" of Christ?

Answer: I'm not sure what you are driving at with the question. The classical doctrine of the Trinity that is enshrined in the Nicene Creed is that the persons of the Trinity are all equal manifestations of the divine nature, and so all would be omnipotent. Omnipotence is an essential property of God. So the Son is omnipotent, the Father is omnipotent, and the Holy Spirit is omnipotent. But nevertheless, in the classical doctrine of the Trinity, the Son derives from the Father in that the Father begets the Son. So there is a kind of

¹¹² 10:10

dependence of the Son upon the Father. And then the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son or directly from the Father, depending on the Orthodox or Catholic views of that.

Followup: This is like the analogy of the Father/Son relationship where a light ray shoots forth from the sun. Can you talk about that?

Answer: Yes, the Son would be like the ray, and the Father would be the body of the sun. The sun and the ray cannot be separated, but nevertheless the ray derives from the sun and not vice versa. That is the analogy that is often used for the Trinity.

Followup: A skeptic could say, “Well, you believe in this begotten Son of God, who was given all authority in the universe – for him to worship the Father seems odd.”

Answer: Two things can be said by those who defend this classic doctrine. First, they would say we are not talking about another God. The Son and the Father are the same God; they are just not the same person. So it is not an example of God’s creating another God and falling down and worshiping it. Rather these persons are the same God. There are three persons who are one God. But then, second, they would want to differentiate very sharply between creating and begetting. Creation is a matter of making an artifact of a different nature than one’s self. For example, the carpenter creates a chair, or the artist creates a painting. These are of a different nature than the artist or the carpenter. But in begetting, the thing that begets begets something of the same nature. Cats beget cats, dogs beget dogs. So we don’t think of this as a creator/creature relationship between the Son and the Father. Rather this is a more intimate relationship where they share the same nature.¹¹³ And therefore it would be different from God’s creating some other being like himself. This is an internal relationship within God that exists between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. That is not to say that this isn’t a problematic doctrine. I do think that the doctrine of the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit is a problematic doctrine. But I do think it is different from this idea of creation and from creating a different God that is distinct from God himself.

Question: About the fact that there is a logically possible state of affairs that can’t be actualized. In the future, there is going to be a sinless world, so does that imply that we will lose our freedom of will?

Answer: Let me qualify that. In one sense there will not be a sinless world, there will be a sinless realm. But the damned will still continue to exist in hell, and they, by their continual hatred of God and continual rejection of God, continue to sin. So in that sense, sinning does go on forever in hell. So the world is never going to be freed of sin, though there will be a sinless realm, which will be heaven. The question you are asking is, in heaven, will people have the freedom to sin? There are a couple of possible ways of dealing with that. One would be to adopt a middle knowledge solution. Remember middle knowledge is the doctrine that says that God knows how every person would freely choose under any circumstances in which he might place him. So God could have chosen to create persons who he knew, if they were glorified in heaven, would always freely choose the right thing from that point on. So given his middle knowledge, God is able to create a world in which there is a realm of saved and glorified persons who, from that point on and in those circumstances, always freely choose to do the right thing.

¹¹³ 15:11

Another possibility is the following. It seems that it is possible that once the saved in heaven are, so to speak, beatified – or see the vision of God or Christ – in all his beauty and holiness, the freedom to sin is effectively removed. Freedom to sin is something that characterized them during this vale of decision-making through which we pass in this life, during which God creates us at a sort of epistemic arm's distance. His glory and holiness and loveliness are veiled so that we have the freedom to rebel against him and to sin. But when we go to heaven and we see God in all of his majesty and his glory and beauty, he will be so irresistible, so attractive, that the freedom to sin will be effectively removed. I do not find that at all implausible. I think that is a very plausible solution – that the freedom to sin is something God gave us during this vale of decision making; but then after our having made our decision, God effectively removes the freedom to sin by giving the vision of his nature to those whom he has saved.

Application

What does it mean, then, for us by way of practical application that we are loved by an omnipotent God? What difference does that make that there is an omnipotent God who is our Savior and our Lord?

First of all, it means that the same almighty God who spoke the world into existence lives and works in you. So you are like a walking stick of dynamite – you have the power of the omnipotent God living and working within you.

Let me read a couple of passages.¹¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:6-10 says,

For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' 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, 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.

Here Paul is saying that despite all of the afflictions and all of the abuse and all of the sufferings that we experience in this life, we have within these earthen vessels (these frail mortal bodies) the same power of God residing that first spoke the universe into being. That is a tremendous encouragement to us, to trust God for great things in our lives.

In Ephesians 1:19-21, 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.

The same resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him in heaven is now in us who believe. His immeasurable power lives within you.

¹¹⁴ 19:56

Then, over in Ephesians 3:20-21, Paul gives this doxology which, for Jan and me, has been very meaningful in our personal lives. “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.” Notice the words there – by the power at work within us he is able to do far more abundantly than all that we can think or ask. This is the power of God that works within us.

So, in Christ, we are tremendously powerful. Jesus says in John 15:5, “Apart from me, you can do nothing.” Apart from him we are powerless. We can do nothing. But Paul says in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” So the abiding, inner power of the omnipotent God can give us strength to do what God calls us to do.

However, there is a caveat here. And that is that very often God’s power does not mean a kind of triumphal, health and wealth success story. Rather it can mean the power to endure and accept tremendous suffering. In 2 Corinthians 12:7ff, Paul talks about his thorn in the flesh, a sort of physical impairment (either a disease or a disability that he suffered with) and that he prayed that God would remove:

And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; 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.¹¹⁵

In weakness, God’s power is displayed most manifestly. So Paul accepted all the more gladly the weaknesses and the sufferings that were his lot because God’s power is made perfect in weakness.

I can think of no better example of this than the story of Mabel, which was shared with me by one of my former colleagues at Westmont College, where I taught for a year. Some of you may have heard this story when we talked about the problem of evil, but I want to share it again because I think it illustrates the point that I am trying to make here about the perfection of God’s power in suffering.

Tom, my colleague, had the habit of visiting nursing homes in the area where he would try to bring some cheer into the lives of the people who were there. And he talks about how one Mother’s Day he visited a particular nursing home. He says:

On this particular day I was walking in a hallway that I had not visited before looking in vain for a few who were alive enough to receive a flower and a few words of encouragement. This hallway seemed to contain some of the worst cases. Strapped onto carts or into wheelchairs and looking completely helpless.

As I neared the end of this hallway I saw an old woman strapped in a wheelchair, her face was an absolute horror. The empty stare and white pupils of her eyes told me that she was blind. The large hearing aid over one ear told me

¹¹⁵ 25:18

that she was almost deaf. One side of her face was being eaten by cancer. There was a discolored and running sore covering part of one cheek and it had pushed her nose to the side, dropped one eye and distorted her jaw so that what should have been the corner of her mouth was the bottom of her mouth. As a consequence, she drooled constantly. I also learned later that this woman was 89 years old and that she had been bedridden, blind, nearly deaf and alone for 25 years. This was Mabel.

I don't know why I spoke to her. She looked less likely to respond than most of the people I saw in that hallway. But I put a flower in her hand and said, "Here is a flower for you, Happy Mother's Day." She held the flower up to her face and tried to smell it and then she spoke and much to my surprise her words, though somewhat garbled because of her deformity, were obviously produced by a clear mind. She said, "Thank you, it's lovely, but can I give it to someone else? I can't see it you know, I'm blind."

I said, "of course," and I pushed her in her chair back down the hallway to a place where I thought I could find some alert patients. I found one and stopped the chair. Mabel held out the flower and said, "Here, this is from Jesus."

It was then that it began to dawn on me that this was not an ordinary human being. . . . Mabel and I became friends over the next few weeks and I went to see her once or twice a week for the next three years. . . . It was not many weeks before I turned from a sense that I was being helpful to a sense of wonder. And I would go to her with a pen and paper to write down the things she would say. . . .

During one hectic week of final exams, I was frustrated because my mind seemed to be pulled in ten directions at once with all of the things that I had to think about. The question occurred to me, what does Mabel have to think about? Hour after hour, day after day, week after week, not even able to know if it is day or night. So I went to her and asked, "Mabel, what do you think about when you lie here?"

And she said, "I think about my Jesus."

I sat there and thought for a moment about the difficulty for me of thinking about Jesus for even five minutes. And I asked, "What do you think about Jesus?" She replied slowly and deliberately as I wrote, and this is what she said,

I think how good he has been to me. He has been awfully good to me in my life, you know. . . . I'm one of those kind who's mostly satisfied. . . . Lots of folks would think I'm kind of old-fashioned. But I don't care. I'd rather have Jesus, he is all the world to me.

And then Mabel began to sing an old hymn:

Jesus is all the world to me,
My life, my joy, my all.
He is my strength from day to day,
Without him, I would fall.

When I am sad, to him I go.
 No other one can cheer me so.
 When I am sad, he makes me glad.
 He's my friend.

This is not fiction. Incredible as it may seem, a human being really lived like this. I know, I knew her. *How could she do it?* Seconds ticked and minutes crawled, and so did days and weeks and months and years of pain without human company and without an explanation of why it was all happening – and she laid there and sang hymns. *How could she do it?*

The answer, I think, is that Mabel had something that you and I don't have much of. She had power. Lying there, in that bed, unable to move, unable to see, unable to hear, unable to talk. . . , she had incredible power.¹¹⁶

I think that that is such a beautiful illustration of this point:¹¹⁷ God's power is made perfect in weakness and manifested there. So we are, indeed, walking sticks of dynamite; but this may not evidence itself in great triumph or great success in some persons, who are called upon to suffer for the Lord. It may manifest itself in incredible strength and perseverance in hardship.

Secondly, God's omnipotence means that nothing can defeat God's purposes. Ephesians 1:11 speaks of God as him who "accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will." In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." God's purposes will be accomplished. If God wants something for you, you will get it. You can count on it, he will accomplish it.

Think of the illustration of Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph's brothers hated him, they kidnapped him, sold him into slavery in Egypt, lied to their father that he had been killed by a wild animal, and thought they had washed their hands of their younger brother forever. Instead, God was with Joseph, elevated him through prison to Pharaoh's right hand, and eventually he became the instrument of his own family's salvation when famine hit Palestine and they came down to Egypt looking for food. Joseph says to his brothers when he meets them again, finally disclosing his identity, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good and has brought this to pass." God's purposes will prevail because he is omnipotent.

But again, here's the caveat. God's will for your life can include failure. Don't think that God's will for you is that you will always succeed in the purposes to which you are called. God can will that you fail, and he can lead you into failure. Why? Because there are things that God has to teach you through failure that you can never learn through success. And his purposes can be accomplished through your failing even though this may not be your plan or desire. God's purposes are much larger than our petty plans and desires. It will be God's purposes that will not be defeated, it will be God's purposes that will be accomplished, and we need to seek to align our wills with his so that our projects

¹¹⁶ Thomas E. Schmidt, *Trying to Be Good: A Book of Doing for Thinking People* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 180-183.

¹¹⁷ 31:34

and purposes can fit in with his. But we go out in the confidence that God's purposes will be accomplished; it will be done.¹¹⁸

Finally, number three, God's omnipotence means that God is adequate to all of your needs. There is no hurt too deep, no prayer too hard, no need that is too great, there is no temptation that is too strong, there is no misery that is too deep that God cannot meet it fully. God is capable of meeting all of our needs – physical, emotional, spiritual, whatever. Therefore, we need to be trusting in him, totally committed to him and walking in the center of his will for our lives.

To bring to a close this section on God's omnipotence, I want to simply repeat again that wonderful benediction that Paul gives to the Ephesian church, from Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

DISCUSSION

Question: I believe that we can never fully appreciate God unless we have lived in this world and gone through its trials and tribulations that we face here.

Answer: Yes, Jesus said, "He who has been forgiven much, loves much; he who has been forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:47) I think there is truth in what you say. Those of us who have spent time as non-Christians and came to faith as adults, I think sometimes have a deeper sense of that from which we've been saved than folks who have been brought from the cradle up into the Christian faith. Though they know the blessings of a Christian home and all that that brings, still, as you say, there is greater appreciation for Christ's salvation and God's love and what he has done if you've tasted that other side as well, the hardship, misery, and sin that life apart from him brings.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ 35:03

¹¹⁹ Total Running Time: 38:14 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 18

Personal – Moral: Holiness

Personal – Moral: Holiness

We have been talking about the attributes of God, and we have been looking specifically at the attributes that God possesses in virtue of being a personal being. We just completed looking at God's volitional attributes, that is to say, his being all-powerful or omnipotent. Now we want to move to God's moral attributes. Since God is a personal being, he is a moral agent and therefore possesses moral attributes.

The first of these that we want to talk about is God's holiness. We'll be looking at some scriptural data concerning the holiness of God before we attempt to give a systematic summary of it.

Scriptural Data

According to the Bible, *God is the very standard of goodness*. Romans 9:14-21:

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?

What Paul seems to be saying here is that God is answerable to no one. He is not to be brought before the bar of justice by anybody because God is the ultimate standard of justice. He is the ultimate source of goodness, and, therefore, there is no higher court of appeal, no bar before which God can be brought to account for his actions. God himself is the highest court; he is the standard of goodness itself.

Secondly, the Scripture consistently affirms that *God is absolutely holy in his nature and being*. Look, for example, at Exodus 3:4-5. This is the story where Moses first encounters God in the burning bush, the vision of God that he sees in the burning bush:

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."

So the very presence of God sanctified the ground and made it holy because of God's presence there. Leviticus 19:2 shows what implication this has for our lives as followers of God. "Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'" So just as God is holy, we are to be holy in turn. We are to reflect his righteousness in our lives. Finally, in the last book of the New Testament, Revelation 4:8, we have John's vision of the heavenly throne room and the praise that is offered to God in heaven. "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!'"¹²⁰ Here is the praise that is offered to God as the ultimate holy being. So God is absolutely holy.

Thirdly, *God's holiness serves to expose man's sinfulness*. When we look at ourselves and our lives in light of God's holiness, it exposes how terribly dirty and deeply stained we are with sin. Isaiah 6:1-5 is the vision of God that the prophet Isaiah had in the temple in Jerusalem. Here he says,

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!"

In response to his vision of God in all his purity and awful holiness, Isaiah says, "I am undone because I am unclean. I am not holy myself." He sees his own sin so clearly reflected as a result of God's holiness.

Finally, number four, *God's holiness separates man from him*. Because God is holy, it serves to separate sinful man from God. Habakkuk 1:13; here the prophet says to God, "Thou who art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on wrong, why dost thou look on faithless men, and art silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?" Here, the prophet is complaining to God, "If you are so holy, so pure, Lord, that you cannot look upon evil, why do you tolerate the wicked, who seem to be getting away with it, while righteous people perish and fail?" Apart from the hard question that the prophet poses, the thing that I want to focus on is the presupposition of the question, namely, that God is of such purity that he cannot behold evil; he cannot look upon wrong. That is to say, evil is dispersed from the presence of God in the same way that darkness is dispersed in the presence of light. When you come into a room and turn on the light, the darkness is dissipated and dispersed immediately by the light. In the same way, evil cannot exist in personal communion or relationship with God. It is dispersed from his presence in the same way that darkness is dispersed by light. The consequence of that for us as sinful people is that we therefore are separated from God by our sin. Isaiah 59:1-2: "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

¹²⁰ 5:21

and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear.” So he says, “The problem isn’t on God’s side; the difficulty isn’t that God’s impotent and can’t do something or that God is hard of hearing and therefore doesn’t attend to your prayer.¹²¹ Rather,” he says, “It is that your sins have made a separation between you and God so he doesn’t hear your prayer and his face is hidden from you.” Of course, this tension, this problem, creates the whole basis for the need of salvation. What must we do to be saved? We will talk about that when we get to the doctrine of salvation, but here we want to focus simply on the holiness of God, this *moral* property of God, and the problem that this occasions for us as sinful human beings.

DISCUSSION

Question: How would we relate God’s omnipresence with what you just talked about – his not being able to look upon sin?

Answer: Very good question! how can God be omnipresent, everywhere present, if he cannot abide evil and if evil cannot exist in his presence? I think the answer to that question is, as we saw when we looked at omnipresence, that what omnipresence amounts to is that God is causally active at and cognizant of everything at every point in space. There is no place in the world where God is not causally active, sustaining it in being, and where he doesn’t know what is happening. He knows what is going on there. So he is omnipresent, not in the sense that he is an ether that is sort of “spread out” through the world, but in the sense that he is causally sustaining whatever exists there and he is also cognizant of what is going on there. That means that God is present even in hell – in this metaphysical sense. Even with regard to those who are in hell, they exist only because God sustains them in being; otherwise they would be annihilated; and he certainly knows what is going on in hell. He knows the denizens of hell curse him and hate him and so forth. But I think what Isaiah is talking about when he says that there is a separation between you and God is a relational separation, that one’s personal relationship with God is ruptured and severed. So there is a separation in that relational sense – those in hell do not experience God as present because they have no relationship with him. As sinners non-redeemed, without Christ, similarly we find ourselves spiritually separated from God, groping in darkness, even though God is all around us. So make a distinction here between God’s metaphysical presence, which is everywhere, and his relational presence, which is not there for those who are separated from him and therefore under his judgment and wrath.

Question: Would you say that the sin just kind of clouds our spiritual lives?

Answer: This is another good distinction that you are making. As those who are redeemed in Christ, our position with respect to God is one of reconciliation and fellowship. There is no sin that separates you from him anymore. You are forgiven; when he looks at you, he sees you in Christ. There you are forgiven, redeemed, and the righteousness of Christ is credited to your account. That is why Wesley, who wrote the hymn, “And Can It Be,” can say, “*Bold* I approach the eternal throne” because I am in Christ, and in Christ I am redeemed and just. But in our experience, of course, as Christians we fail miserably often,

¹²¹ 10:10

we succumb to temptations and weaknesses and therefore in our experience, as you say, our apprehension of God will be clouded often by sin. We will feel estranged from God because we don't have a clear conscience and we are harboring sin in our hearts. So that relationship that exists positionally may not be experientially present.¹²² That emphasizes the importance of daily confession of sin, constant self-examination, asking God to cleanse and forgive us and then to fill us again with his Holy Spirit. As we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are cleansed and sanctified and morally improved so that, hopefully, as we go on in life, we will sin less and less and become increasingly Christ-like in our character. That would be the work of the Holy Spirit, filling us, controlling us, and yielding his fruit in our lives. I love the way the apostle Paul puts it in Galatians: "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." It is allowing Christ to live out his life through us that will bring that more experiential dimension that we have positionally. But the great thing is, that wherever you are experientially, as you are in Christ and trust in him, you are reconciled to God as just and cleansed and holy in his sight because he sees you in the righteousness of Christ.

Question: Why do we consider omnipresence an infinite attribute, but not omniscience or omnipotence?

Answer: As I said when we looked at those attributes in the Introduction, all of God's essential attributes are really infinite. So certainly he is infinite in his holiness, in his omniscience, and all of his other attributes. But what I was trying to do is to draw a distinction between those attributes that God has in virtue of being personal and those attributes that he has not in virtue of being personal. For example, moral properties are properties that only a person can have. Inanimate objects, or mere animals, don't have moral value because they are not moral agents. They do not have free will. Similarly, volitional attributes require a mind, and so you have to have a person in order to have attributes relating to the will. This is a somewhat arbitrary classification, as you say. Think of it as just a convenience. But certainly you are right that we should think of God's essential attributes as all unlimited in their nature.

Systematic Summary

Let's go on and do a systematic analysis of this attribute.

God's Will or God's Nature?

The principal problem with thinking of God as the source of moral values is the dilemma captured in Plato's dialogue called *Euthyphro*. This is often called the "Euthyphro Argument" or the "Euthyphro Dilemma." You will hear this every time from a non-believer if you claim that God is the ultimate source and locus of moral value. The question that is posed in the *Euthyphro* dialogue is this: "Do the gods love something because it is good or is it good because the gods love it?" Plato was posing the question in a polytheistic context, but it can be posed in a monotheistic context as well. The first horn of the dilemma would be, "Is something good because God wills it?" For example,

¹²² 15:08

is it wrong to murder because God says, “Thou shalt not kill?” Is it good to love your neighbor because God says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself?” Is something good because God has decreed that this is good? The other horn of the dilemma would be to say, “Does God will something because it is good?” That is to say, does God will that you should love your neighbor because this is a good thing to do? God, being a perfectly good being, would therefore will it. Does he proscribe child abuse and stealing and lying because they are really bad and so naturally a good God would say that you shall not do these things? Does God will something because it is good?¹²³

The claim of the Euthyphro argument is that either one of these alternatives has unacceptable consequences for the theist. If you say that something is good because God wills it, then that makes good and evil arbitrary. The reason it is wrong to rape and torture someone is simply because God said so, and he could have willed otherwise. He could have willed that we ought to hate one another and to seek to be as cruel as we can to each other. But that seems unconscionable. In that case, there really aren’t any objective moral values. They are just the results of God’s arbitrary will, and it could have easily gone the other way. So it seems wrong to say that something is good just because God wills it.

But suppose the theist says that God wills something because it really is good. Well, that means that there is some higher standard of goodness beyond God, to which God is himself subject, and he must look to that higher standard and see that it is good to do various things and therefore make his commandments on that basis. Indeed, on that basis, God would be good because he meets that standard himself. But the problem with that is that means God is not the source of moral values, that God is not the ultimate standard – there is a higher court of appeals beyond God and God must measure up to it.

The non-theist will, therefore, say that the Euthyphro dilemma shows that moral values cannot be grounded in God.

DISCUSSION

Question: Is the assumption that it has to be one or the other, or can it not be some other idea?

Answer: You see, there you go! You know how to deal with a dilemma! You ask if this is a true dilemma or if this is a false dilemma. Maybe there is a third alternative. That is exactly the case here – the Euthyphro argument is, in fact, a false dilemma. It is not saying “A or not-A.” It is saying “A or B.” Well, why not “C?” Maybe there is another alternative. This is a false dilemma. That is the angle that will be taken.

Question: Is good and evil defined by God immediately at creation and our understanding of them is distorted after that?

Answer: The whole point of this argument is to show that it can’t be like that. God cannot be the thing that defines what good and evil is because if you say that he does it by willing it, then it becomes arbitrary what good and evil is. But if you say that he wills something because it is good, then there is something higher than God. The view you

¹²³ 20:18

expressed, which would be the typical Christian view, this argument claims to refute.

Solution to the Euthyphro Dilemma

What, I think, is wrong with this argument is that it is a false dilemma. We should not adopt either of those two alternatives. Rather we should say, in a sense, what Plato himself said, which is, namely, that God's very nature is the Good. The Good just *is* the [concrete] moral nature of God himself. This moral nature expresses itself necessarily toward us in the form of certain divine commandments that then constitute our moral duties: you shall love the Lord your God with all your strength and mind and heart, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you shall not steal, you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery. The moral commands of God are not arbitrary but rather are necessary reflections of God's very nature. On this view, our moral duties are constituted by God's commands, but those commands are not ultimately rooted in God's arbitrary will. Rather they are expressions of his essential nature.¹²⁴ It is impossible that God could have willed "You shall hate your neighbor and seek to do him harm and kill him" or "You shall not love the Lord your God" and that child abuse or torture would be good or that loving one another would be evil. That is impossible because it is contrary to the very nature of God himself.

So, in answer to the Euthyphro dilemma, the third alternative is to say, "God wills something because *he* is good." It is not correct to say that something is good because God wills it, and it is not correct to say that God wills something because it is good; rather we should say God wills something because *he* is good. That is to say, God's own moral nature is determinative of what the good is, and that expresses itself toward us in the form of certain moral commands that then become our duties.

One interesting implication of this view is that since God presumably doesn't issue commands to himself, he doesn't have any moral duties. It means that he doesn't have to obey his own commands, so to speak. Rather what we would say is that God, by his very nature, would act in accordance with what he commands, but not in obedience to what he commands. It isn't as though God is under some higher law than himself. He would simply act in accordance with the moral law in a natural kind of way rather than having a duty to obey, as we do. The commandments are issued to us, so we have moral duties to discharge. On this view, God acts in accordance with the good, but it is not as though God is duty-bound in order to fulfill some sort of moral obligation.

DISCUSSION

Question: I thought of an objection someone might raise on this using a sort of Ockham's Razor that says you are assuming a God that is unnecessarily complex by inferring that he has a personality rather than just sort of a stoic computer-like being. Have you ever heard of someone offering an objection like this?

Answer: Let me remind us what we are doing here. We are not doing apologetics here.

¹²⁴ 25:09

We are doing systematic theology. We are saying, “Given the Christian view of God, how should we understand his holiness? Given his self-revelation in Scripture, how do we understand the holiness of God?” Don’t think that we are trying to offer some kind of an argument for the personhood of God or moral values’ being grounded in him. All we have to do here is to simply ward off objections. This would be defensive apologetics, if you will, rather than positive apologetics. I think there are arguments we can give for the personhood of God – the design argument would be one; the *kalam* cosmological argument also gives you an intelligent, free agent as a creator. There are good arguments for that, but that is not what we are about now. We are doing theology right now, not apologetics.

Question: Does this mean that somehow God, by definition, cannot act unjustly? For example, some people might point to certain things in the Bible where God instructed the Israelites to kill the women and children and so forth. They might say it’s an unjust thing for him to tell them to do. How is that involved?

Answer: I think that does relate to our topic. God doesn’t have the same sort of moral duties that we do. For example, you do not have the moral right to pull a gun out and shoot somebody. But if God wanted to strike me dead right now, that is his prerogative. All life is his; he is under no moral obligation whatsoever to prolong my life another instant. God is not under the same sort of moral commands that we are under. It *does* mean that he can say to Abraham, “Go and sacrifice your son Isaac,” and Abraham should obey what God has told him to do. I think that *is* an implication of this. What we can be thankful for is that God is a good God and therefore can’t issue commandments that would be evil or wrong and that, when he does issue commandments that are difficult, like the ones dealing with driving out the nations of Canaan, he has a morally sufficient reason for doing so. We could talk about that a lot more but this has been addressed in several places by several people (*e.g.* Question of the Week #16, “Slaughter of the Canaanites” on www.reasonablefaith.org, or Paul Copan’s book *Is God A Moral Monster?*). But I basically want to affirm that this sort of view makes room for that sort of peculiarity, in that God is not under the same moral commands and obligations that we are under and therefore can do things that we would not have the freedom to do, such as take life.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Total Running Time: 31:18 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 19

Application of God's Holiness

Application

We have been looking at God's holiness, God's moral attributes. Last time I argued that we should think of God as the paradigm, the locus, the source of all moral value and standards. He is the plumb line that determines good and evil. God's nature is essentially loving, kind, impartial, fair, compassionate, and so forth. God's nature issues necessarily in divine commandments to us as finite moral agents. These constitute our moral duties. Our moral duties are based in God's commands, which are not arbitrary but are necessary reflections of God's essential nature. I argued that that solves the problem about whether something is good because God wills it, or whether God wills it because it is good. The correct answer is to say that God wills something because *he* is good. He is essentially good, and therefore his nature expresses itself in these commands.

There are three points of application of God's holiness. First of all, it means that *we should strive for personal holiness in our lives*. Just as God is holy, he has commanded us to be holy. Therefore, we need to make it a focus, an ambition, of our lives as individuals to lead holy lives personally. Here it can be helpful to remind ourselves of how much God hates sin. We tend to trivialize sin and think of it as a minor peccadillo that we might commit and not all that serious or bad. But when you read Scripture and you see how sin flies in the face of God and his very nature – how much he hates sin and is repulsed by it –, it can also help us to be repulsed by our own personal sin. In the book of Revelation 14:18-20 is the terrifying vision of the wine press of the wrath of God, where the wrath of God is metaphorically described as this great wine press that crushes out the grapes of wrath:

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 200 miles of blood as deep as a horse's bridle flowing out of this great wine press of the wrath of God. Now that is an image that we don't like to talk about, isn't it? We want to think of the love of God! But the wrath of God is the expression of his holy anger and indignation against sin. We must not trivialize sin. One sin kept Moses out of the Promised Land, you will recall. One sin destroyed Ananias and Sapphira.

The problem is that so often we have great thoughts of ourselves and little thoughts of

God.¹²⁶ Look at Psalms 50:21, where the Lord 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.” Here God is saying, “You thought I was like you, and that is why you thought I was silent – because you thought I would just overlook these things as unimportant or trivial.” He says, “No! I now rebuke you – I lay the charge before you.” These things are not trivial. These things contravene the very nature of God and therefore fly in his face. God cannot tolerate sin. He hates it. His wrath is poured out upon sin. When you think that this is an expression of the holiness of God, then this becomes part of the greatness of God.

In fact, Stephen Davis, who is a Christian philosopher, has written something rather startling on this. This is what he has written on the wrath of God:

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.¹²⁷

That is a profound insight. If you had trouble in the past with God’s wrath, perhaps looking at it in that perspective can help you to see it in a more positive light. It shows that right and wrong are real and really matter and shows us how to live.

Of course, it needs to be said that God doesn’t hate you – rather, he hates the sin. He hates the sin that stains and mars our lives. But he loves you – he loves you as his child. We must not ever miss that. We must never think that God is somehow hateful of us as his children. He sees us in Christ. But when he sees us destroying ourselves by sin, injuring ourselves – it is like someone cutting or maiming himself. When he sees us engaged in that sort of activity, it hurts God’s heart because he knows that this is evil and wrong. He doesn’t want us to live that way. We need to remind ourselves of how much God hates sin and of his wrath upon sin. That will help us to look at our own sin with the loathing that we really ought to look at it with.

So when we look at our sin, we should not trivialize it but we should see it as God sees it – as something repulsive and ugly and something to be eliminated from our lives through the sanctifying work of Christ’s Holy Spirit within us.

Secondly, it means that *we therefore need to live 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’.” What Peter is saying here is that we are to not be conformed to the lives that we had previously as non-Christians, but now, having come to know Christ, we are to, in all of our conduct, live lives that are without blemish and are

¹²⁶ 4:55

¹²⁷ Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), p. 166.

free of the taint of sin. This should be our aim in life.

When we do this, this is a way of bringing honor to God. Lives that are lived without blemish, that are lived in a holy manner, honor God.¹²⁸

1 John 1:5-10 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. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Here John is encouraging these Christian believers to walk in the light, not in the darkness. He recognizes that we do have sin in our lives, but the promise in 1 John 1:9 is that God is faithful and just and he will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness if we confess. If we simply repent of our sins, acknowledge them rather than rationalize them, then God will forgive us and cleanse us from unrighteousness.

1 John 2:3-6:

And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says “I know him” but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

The person who truly loves God will allow the life of Christ to shape his own life through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to sanctify his life so that he will walk in the light. He will walk in the same way that Christ walked. If you say, “Oh, I love God,” but you continue to live deliberately in sin, John says you are lying. This is hypocrisy. Someone who really loves God will keep his commandments and abide in him and walk in the same way that Christ walked. Of course, we can’t do this in the strength of the flesh. It can only be through the power of the indwelling Christ within us, as we yield our lives to him and let him live his life through us. We should purpose, in light of God’s hatred of sin and in light of his holiness, to lead holy lives ourselves, lives that are without blemish, but of course to confess immediately whenever we stumble.

Number three, *holiness is the secret to happiness*. If there is one thing that I would covet for those who are young to get from this lesson, it would be this third point. You will save yourself a boatload of heartache and ruin if you will simply learn this secret. Holiness is the secret to happiness. What does Jesus say in Matthew 6:33? “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.” Jesus says, don’t focus on material possessions, food, clothing, length of life, and so forth – he says those aren’t the important things. He says seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and all these other things will be taken care of; they will be yours as well.

¹²⁸ 9:51

This is such a paradox because people want so desperately to be happy; they want to find happiness. But I have found that happiness is sort of like a will-o'-the-wisp.¹²⁹ A will-o'-the-wisp is something that when you seek it and you try to seize it, it always eludes your grasp. You can't get it. You grasp for it, and it goes on further. That is the way happiness is. If you seek happiness directly, you never find it. It is sort of like the person who says, "Are we having fun yet?" If you go out with that as your aim, you are not going to have fun. Fun is a byproduct of activity. Happiness pursued directly will always elude your grasp. The secret of the Christian life is that you seek, not happiness in life, but seek holiness. When you do that, all of a sudden you discover that happiness has crept up behind you and is there on your shoulder and that you are leading a tremendously happy life because you have been seeking the holiness of God. This will be true even if that life is punctuated, indeed permeated, with suffering and hardship and failure and trial. Think of the story of Mabel that I read earlier – this woman who lived for 25 years with blindness, deafness, alone and forgotten in a nursing home with cancer eating away her face. Yet she said, "I've lived such a wonderful life, I'm so blessed and I love the Lord so much" because she sought him and his kingdom first, and happiness was the byproduct, despite the misery of her circumstances.

So especially for those who are young, I would encourage you to not seek to be happy in life – seek instead to be holy as much as you can. Try to lead a holy life for God, and happiness will take care of itself. I remember sharing this truth with a young woman who was married to a missionary. They were a young couple in the Lord's service, and she fell into an adulterous affair with a man in the neighborhood, and she wanted to leave her husband. I said to her, "Look at what this verse says: 'Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.' You need to focus on being holy and pure, and even though you are not happy with your husband, seek for Christ's holiness and then work through these things." But she said, "Well, I just want to be happy," and so she walked away from her husband and her three children and went off with this other man. It was such a tragedy. "Because I want to be happy!" This is the way Hollywood and commercials cater to our self-interest. "You deserve to be happy!" they say, so buy our product, or do this thing, and go for it! But that is not the Christian way of living. The Christian way of living is to strive to be holy, and happiness will be the byproduct of it. I think I can honestly say that in our lives we have proved the Lord over and over again in this respect. As we sought his will and sought to do the right thing, he gave us a tremendous, deep-seated satisfaction and joy in life.

So we need to be reminded of how much God hates sin and of the wrath of God. We therefore need to live lives that are without blemish and are pleasing to him. Those were sub-points under the first point. The second point is that we should understand that holiness is the secret of happiness. I've got one more major application, a more theological point that I think is also wonderful and I don't want you to miss, and it is this: *in Christ, God's holiness becomes the source of our justification.*

As we saw from talking about the wrath of God, for those who are outside of Christ, the holiness of God is an awful terror. The holiness of God is expressed to those outside of Christ as the wrath of God – this terrifying, horrible image of absolute justice. This

¹²⁹ 14:58

holiness is the source of God's justice and wrath upon sin. The holiness of God is something that is terrifying for those outside of Christ. But for those who are in Christ, that very holiness becomes the source of our justification in Christ.

This was Martin Luther's great insight that helped to spark the Reformation.¹³⁰ As a Catholic monk, Luther was paralyzed with fear of God. He was terrified because of his sin, and everything he did to try to confess, to do penance, to live a righteous life seemed unavailing to him because he knew he could never satisfy the demands of perfect justice. So he felt the wrath and the condemnation of God's justice upon his life as a terrible terror. But what Luther then came to see through his study of the book of Romans was that this justice of God is credited to his account by faith to those who are in Christ, and it becomes the source of our justification and forgiveness.

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."

What Luther came to see was that through faith in God, that very righteousness of God becomes the source of our sanctification and redemption. Paul goes on to write in this wonderful paragraph in Romans 3:21-26 on justification,

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 him who has faith in Jesus.

God is himself just, and he justifies him who has faith in Christ Jesus. That, again, – if you have struggled with the concept of God's holiness and wrath – can help you put a positive picture or aspect on this attribute of God. It is the source of your salvation. At the cross, your sin and guilt are placed on Christ, and Christ's righteousness is credited to your account. Your sin imputed to Christ; Christ's divine righteousness imputed to you. So when God looks at you, he sees you clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He sees your account fully credited with all of the righteousness of God himself. The holiness of God is now credited to your account in Christ. So you are completely sanctified and justified before him. God's holiness that once condemned us is the same thing that now saves us, as the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us.

That is the second application that I wanted to make. First was that we should strive for personal holiness in our lives, and the second is that, in Christ, God's holiness becomes the source of our justification. This is a wonderful attribute of God that we don't want to miss. It has tremendous practical application both for our personal living as well as for

¹³⁰ 20:06

our salvation.

DISCUSSION

Question: (inaudible)

Answer: Yes, this notion of imputation is very significant. I was talking to an insurance salesman one time about this and about how Christ's righteousness is credited to us. And he said, "Oh, I understand that! That is imputation." And I asked how he knew that. He said they use imputation all the time in the insurance business.¹³¹ He said there are certain kinds of insurance policies that if, for example, you loan your car to somebody else and he drives it and gets in an accident, the responsibility is imputed to you as the owner of the car and as the insurance policy holder, rather than to the driver. He understood this concept perfectly. This is a very important theological category in terms of this greatest transaction that has ever taken place in human history. My sinfulness for his righteousness! What a trade!

Question: Can you expound on some of the biblical characters like Samson and David and the tremendous sins that these men fell into. Yet, they are giants of the faith.

Answer: I must say that I have struggled with that myself. When you look at a guy like David – just think if one of our pastoral staff here at church were to do what David did: see a naked woman, kill her husband, and go and commit adultery with her! We would be incensed! And yet this man is regarded as the great champion of the faith. I think the one way I can help to understand this is to realize that these people were trying to live according to God's law without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They did not have the Holy Spirit the way we do in a post-Pentecost age. Every Christian is indwelt with the Holy Spirit, and it is only through being filled with the Holy Spirit that we can be sanctified and live the kind of holy life that we've been describing here. But can you imagine what it would be like to try to live according to God's law bereft of the Holy Spirit, if you didn't have the Spirit of God, if you weren't a regenerate Christian? No wonder you would fall into sin! With guys like Samson, the Spirit would come upon these judges to do a great task, but then he would depart again. He would seize them temporarily, and they would carry out some great feat. But it wasn't until Pentecost that the temple of our bodies came to replace the Jewish temple as the permanent place where God himself resides. These monumental failures that you see in the Old Testament need to be looked at in the perspective that these folks didn't have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the way that we do.

Followup: I guess it did take quite a bit of faith to go against a giant with a slingshot by yourself.

Answer: Absolutely! They did do these great feats. What is paradoxical is that these great feats are accompanied by these great failures.

Question: Can we take too much license with grace when we start talking about following God's commandments? There seems to be a balance there of grace versus following

¹³¹ 25:05

God's commands and staying away from sin.

Answer: There is definitely a tension here. Some theologians have talked about the idea of “cheap grace.” What they mean by that is the kind of attitude towards sin in our lives that says, “Well, God will forgive you – go ahead, it’s all good!” That does cheapen grace. It doesn’t take seriously the price at which we’ve been bought, and it is inconsistent with the Scripture we’ve seen in this lesson. He who claims to love God will walk in the light as Christ was in the light. I am not advocating some kind of a cheap grace. The danger is people who fall into thinking of the Christian life as a life of do’s and don’ts and that it is something you have to live according to these rules. That is not right – that leads to a kind of burn out. What we have got to find is the truth about God as this loving, heavenly Father who wants us to live holy, sanctified lives through his indwelling Spirit and power. And that is where the balance is.¹³²

¹³² Total Running Time: 30:39 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)

§ III. DOCTRINE OF GOD

1. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lecture 20

Personal: God's Love

We want to wrap up our section on the attributes of God. We have been looking at the moral attributes of God, and last time we talked about God's holiness. Today we want to talk about God's love. Let's take our Bibles and look at some of the scriptural data concerning God's love.

First of all, the Bible teaches that *God's nature is loving*. God is, by his very essence, 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.

Here John says that the very nature of God is love. It is because of God's love that he sent his Son into the world and that we can love one another. The concept of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition is a wonderful, beautiful concept of an essentially loving God who loves us and sends his Son for us. "Thank God for God!" it has been said – that this is the kind of God whom we worship.

Moreover, secondly, *God's love is unconditional*. Deuteronomy 7:7-8 where the Lord talks about his love for his people in Israel:

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 because of anything special about you, Israel, that I chose you and rescued you. It was simply because I love you.” God’s love is just unconditional and given freely.

In the New Testament, in Ephesians 2:4-5 we read: “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).” There was nothing about us that was lovely, nothing about us that would inspire God to care for us.¹³³ We were dead in sin, but simply because of his great love given to us, by his grace we have been saved.

Finally, let’s read Titus 3:3-5 which is one of the richest passages in the New Testament. Titus 3:3 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.” What a description of the unregenerate man, of the natural man, apart from the grace of God! That is the way we once were, Paul says. But he continues, in Titus 3:4-5: “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.”

So there wasn’t anything about us that was attractive, anything about us that would compel God to love us; but simply in virtue of his own mercy and loving kindness he saved us. And the word in the Greek for loving kindness here is very interesting. It is *philanthropia*. It comes from the Greek word *philos*, which means “love” and then *anthropos*, which means “man.” It means that God loves people, he is a people lover. It is the word, of course, from which we get “philanthropy” and “philanthropist.” God is the true philanthropist, according to Titus 3:4, because God is *philanthropos* – he loves people, – and that is why he saved us. Thus, God’s love is unconditional.

Thirdly, *God’s love is immutable*. Jeremiah 31:3 says, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.” This is the way God loves you – with an everlasting love. It is an immutable, unchangeable, and undying love that he has for us.

That is some of the biblical material about God’s love. Now what systematic summary might we make of this? We simply want to say that God is a being who is as loving as he is holy. We saw last time how the holiness of God belongs to the very essence of God, who he is. And God’s loving kindness is as essential to him and as central to his being as is his holiness. God’s love, moreover, is *agape* love. This is a word in the New Testament that is coined to express an unconditional sort of love. Agape is a love that is freely given without condition. There is nothing that you can do to merit it or earn it – it is simply given in an unconditional way. That is the kind of love that God exhibits.

Christianity presents us, in a sense, with a great paradox. On the one hand, God hates our sin because of his holiness. But on the other hand, God loves the sinner, and he loves the

¹³³ 5:03

sinner as intensely as he hates his sin. Look at Romans 5:8: “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” God’s love is not shown to us after we come to Christ, it is shown to us while we were yet sinners, while we were enemies of God – that is when God demonstrates his love for us. While we were yet sinners, while we were still enemies, God demonstrates his love for us. I think we don’t understand this type of love. We think surely there has to be some redeeming feature hidden in us that would cause God to love us. And so we will portray man perhaps as a poor lost victim, the little lamb wandering from the fold, and God is going to bring him back. But the true New Testament picture is that man is not some poor lost victim, he is a hateful rebel. He is an enemy of God. He is opposed to God, and yet God loves him and sends his Son to redeem him and bring him to salvation in Christ.¹³⁴

So the love and the justice of God work together to bring people to Christ. I remember when, as a non-Christian, I first heard the Gospel message. On the one hand, the love of God drew me, as Sandy, who sat in front of me in German class, shared with me that God loved me. That thought was so staggering, so overwhelming, to think that the God of the universe loved me! And yet at the same time, as I read the New Testament and I thought about hell and my separation from God and his wrath upon me, I was terrified because I realized that I was under the condemnation of the holy and righteous God and therefore rightfully condemned by him. I had no trouble at all when I looked at the blackness of my own heart in thinking that God was going to send me to hell. The love of God drew me, but the justice of God impelled me to come to Christ, and both of them cooperated in bringing me to salvation.

What application can we draw of this attribute for our lives today? There are three points. First of all, it implies that *we*, as Christians, should *bathe in the sunshine of God’s love for us*. God loves us as his children, and we ought to exult in that. In 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.

Here Paul speaks of the immeasurable, unfathomable love of Christ – the infinite breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ that is ours. We ought to exult in that and relish it. Remember we saw in 1 John 4:18 that there is no fear in love. We need not fear God anymore, in the sense of thinking he is some tyrant, some wrathful person, that has it out for us. God is on your side, he loves you, and he wants the best for you.

The Scripture teaches that there is now no separation between us and God’s love. 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,

¹³⁴ 10:19

“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.

There is really only one thing that could separate you from the love of God. There is nothing else that can do it. The only thing would be yourself, by turning your back on it and rejecting it and separating yourself from the love of God. In the little epistle of Jude there is an exhortation that is given that, I think, we'd do well to heed. Jude 21: “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” We need to be earnest about walking with the Lord day by day and keeping ourselves in the love of God so that we don't fall away.

You remember in Revelation 2:4-5 the rebuke to the church in Ephesus was that they had left their first love.¹³⁵ It said they did many good things, and they had many good qualities, but God had this against them – they left their first love, and therefore they needed to repent and do again the works they did at first. We need to, as Jude says, keep ourselves in the love of God and remind ourselves of God's love for us and make sure we are walking in that love.

Secondly, *God's love is the basis for self-love*. In today's society, so many people struggle with feelings of inadequacy and inferiority and worthlessness. We find it hard to believe many times that we are really worth anything. And yet, that is a denial of God's love for you. God's love is the basis for self-love. Because God loves you so much, you are worthy. We saw in our discussion of divine omniscience that God knows everything about us and yet he still loves us. Remember we said there are no skeletons in the closet that he might discover that would cause him to cease to love you, nothing in the future that you might do that would impair his love for you. He knows all about us, all of our weaknesses and all of our sinfulness, and yet he loves us unfailingly. Therefore, we can love ourselves and accept ourselves because God does, and we are righteous and redeemed in him.

Finally, thirdly, *God's love is the basis for love of others*. We saw this in 1 John 4:19-21 where 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.

It is on the basis of God's love for us that we then can allow that love to flow through us to others and gives us a basis for loving them.

In all of these ways the love of God is something that ought to characterize our lives as Christians. We should bathe in his love, exult in his love for us, and it ought to help us see ourselves properly as God sees us and then, in turn, to share his love with others.

¹³⁵ 15:03

In conclusion to this section, what a God God is that we worship as Christians! He is not only infinite, self-existent, necessary, eternal, omnipresent, and immutable, but he is also personal, omniscient, omnipotent, holy, and loving. This is the God that we, as Christians, adore and worship. Before creation ever began and there was only God and no universe at all, God knew you and loved you and planned to take on human form to redeem you and bring you into a love relationship with himself forever. The infinite God of the universe loves you that much! What a glorious truth!

So we come back to the words of Charles Spurgeon with which we began this section:

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.

DISCUSSION

Question: You set up a logical dilemma for me. Either God loves the Egyptians or his love is conditional. Did God love the Egyptians?

Answer: Yes, I do think God did love the Egyptians. In the Old Testament it talks about how God has a plan for these non-Jewish nations to be blessed by God and to be prospered by God. But it will be done through the agency of Israel. Israel is his special elect people through which he will work in the special covenant relationship; but certainly God loves non-Jews. You see that demonstrated throughout the Old Testament – for example, his sending Jonah to Nineveh, a non-Jewish city.¹³⁶ Jonah did not want to go, but God said, “There are 200,000 people in that city that don’t know their left hand from their right – shouldn’t I have compassion on them?” You are quite right that God does have a special relationship with Israel, but Israel is the vehicle through which blessing will come to the whole world.

Question: You mention that people were nothing, but yet God calls us the crown of his creation. The Hebrews were the least of all people, but yet the apple of God’s eye. So by being the apple of God’s eye, doesn’t that give them some special worth?

Answer: I think that the worth does result from his selecting them. But you do make a good point about mankind as the crown of creation, and I don’t want to minimize that. I do not want to say that people are of the value of stones or animals. We are created in the image of God. Remember when we looked at the section on the Doctrine of Man [Series I]. We saw that we are God’s representatives on Earth and that as such we are finite persons just as he is personal and therefore capable of having a relationship with him. I do want to affirm the intrinsic value of humanity in that sense of being created in the image of God; but fallen man in sin is ugly and misshapen and dark, and that is what I meant when I said that there isn’t anything lovely or attractive about fallen man that should compel God to love him. Natural man deserves the justice of God and not his mercy.

¹³⁶ 19:56

Followup: How do we look at the tension between the two? John the Baptist told his fellow Hebrews that God could raise up these stones – they were beginning to have pride in their chosenness and their special place and relying upon that and not on a relationship with God.

Answer: Certainly there is no room for pride. Paul talks in Romans about how Gentiles have been grafted into the olive tree, which symbolized God’s elect in Israel. And he said, “Don’t boast, it is only because of faith you were grafted in – you will be broken off, too, if you apostatize the way Israel did.” So there is no ground for boasting, just for thanks.

Question: My problem with this love relationship with God is that I don’t comprehend what true love is. I love my child, and if my child has a problem that I could fix, I would fix it. I don’t understand love like God understands love.

Answer: I do think that God’s love is the true paradigm for love. The attitude that you actually expressed, I doubt that you really believe that – if your child has a problem, you will fix it – because what that leads to is a doting parent who spoils the child and never allows the child to become a responsible adult. Those are the kinds of parents that still have kids in their twenties living at home, mooching off of the parents, because they haven’t had the tough love to move them out and become adults. There are times that tough love requires you to allow your loved one to go through hardship and pain and suffering because that is part of moral maturity. God is not interested in just having us be spoiled children. He wants to bring us to moral maturity. My doctoral mentor, John Hick, put it very nicely when he said that people think that we are God’s pets and that God’s job is basically to make a nice terrarium for his pets. On the Christian view, that is false. We are not God’s pets. God is in the process of educating us morally to become Christ-like, mature people, and that will involve discipline and suffering and failure and hardship, and that actually is the better part of love. You may be quite right that it is difficult to understand, but I think when you reflect on it, it is true. We see that in our own children.

What we will do next time is turn from the attributes of God to a study of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Scripture teaches not merely that God is personal, as we have already seen, but that God is *tri-personal*. He is three persons. This doctrine serves to differentiate Christianity from other monotheisms like Judaism and Islam, which are unitarian rather than trinitarian in their theology. This will be a vital part of understanding the doctrine of God and, when commending our faith to other monotheists who are not trinitarians, we need to be able to explain why we believe that God is three-in-one and how that makes sense.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Total Running Time: 26:04 (Copyright © 2012 William Lane Craig)