

Theology

The Finite Looks at the Infinite

It is a daunting task to take on the doctrine of theology if it is to be pursued seeking to draw out all possible revelation of God provided to us in the limited time we have to study it. To say the name “God” seems so easy until we consider the depth, magnitude, and scope of what it entails. Truly it is the finite doing all at its disposal to examine what is infinite: the ant looking to comprehend the whole of creation, the speck of dust endeavouring to make a dent upon a mountain. So why undertake an impossible quest, an overwhelming vocation? This incomprehensible has taken consideration of us. He has revealed in finite terms, finite language, finite examples and pictures His limitlessness. Our’s is the fortune to delve into these depths and spend our lives in awe of Who and What He is and what He has done.

As we step into these endless inspiring concepts we will find ourselves agreeing with the Psalmist saying, “what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?” (Psalm. 8:4) Why would one of such significance not only take notice of us, but do anything for us? These revealed truths, when studied and known affect every life perspective and come to control what we desire, admire, worship, fear, love and ultimately live for. A thorough study into Theology defines the question, “What is the meaning of life?” To take God out of focus or to leave out any of these great attributes revealed to us, will have an impact on our lives with or without our knowing it.

All our life errors and misconceptions can be traced to a flawed perception or ignorance of some aspect of Who God is and what He has and will always do. Fear, doubt, greed, lust, bitterness, despair and the like all stem from a focus skewed to the finite and temporal and not focused upon the infinite and eternal. We are creatures of comparison so it is vital we guard our standards and measurements closely, fine tuning them to match those revealed in Scripture. How big is our God? What grabs our awe and affection most? Once coming to grips with these precious truths of God we can never return to what used to dictate our love and fanaticism ... for what could possibly compare to such a God as this?

I. The Existence and “Knowing” of God as Revealed in the Scripture

A. The Incomprehensibility of God

1. This statement does not mean that God cannot be known
 - a. He cannot be fully known but He can and is to be known - Rom. 1:18-19 - there is an innate knowledge and awareness of God in all people
 - b. Knowing of God can be made possible in the creation but special revelation is needed for us to truly know God, Who He is, what He is like and what He does - I Cor. 2:6-16
2. God will not “fit” into our comprehension - He will always surpass our understanding of Him no matter how our knowledge of Him increases - the more we discover, the more there is to discover... and that in each area!
 - a. Terms and examples (anthropomorphisms) will be needed to give us comparable things to give us pictures, ideas and concepts of each “area” of the study of God - such as the “hands” and “face” of God or God describing Himself as “repenting”
 - b. God will use names to present concepts of Who He is such as His name “I Am that I Am” communicating His eternity and self-existence
 - c. He is described in Rom. 11:33, “How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out” - they are unfathomable depths of riches in wisdom and knowledge!
3. As we learn of the attributes and works of God we should find ourselves saying, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain unto it.” - Psa. 139:6
 - a. We will learn of His love, but we will not be able to fully grasp its full scope
 - b. We will learn of His holiness, but His moral and just perfection will expand far past our knowing
 - c. His tri-unity will be displayed but not exemplified with any physical comparison

Any meeting with God or learning of God is to be treated as a place to be considered holy as with Moses being instructed to remove his shoes as he stood on “holy ground”

- c. His eternality will be described but will cause pain with our dwelling too long upon it
- d. His all-knowingness will amaze and confound us at the same time
- e. His limitless control will bring comfort and fear along with weighty questions

B. His existence is assumed in the Bible and denied by fools

1. In Genesis 1:1 it begins presuming His existence and describes what He did
 - a. There, "In the beginning..." He was already there and did something
 - b. We see the affects of His existence in what He did in creation - Heb. 11:3
 - c. These assumptions and "proofs" of God will be discussed throughout this study
2. There are those who deny the existence of God and the knowability of God
 - a. First of all, it must be noted, that the denial of a creator by a created being poses no effective threat to the creator - the ability to think, discern and muse is a God-given ability - His tool, His "allowance", His activity or seeming inactivity will in no way diminish His control or can be used to discount His "plan" seeing as how the creation will always have a minute, limited frame of reference - So, to put it plain, God is not intimidated with sceptics
 - b. There are two general types of atheists - Theoretical and practical atheists
 - (1). The theoretical atheist declares, "there is no God" - this is the one described in Psalm 10:1 and Psalm 53:1 as a "fool" - Psa. 10:4 - "The wicked, in the pride of his countenance, [saith], He will not require [it]. All his thoughts are, There is no God." (ASV)
 - (2). The practical atheist knows of a God but lives as though He is not there - as displayed in living, even Christians can exhibit this type of living - these may be religious or perverted as they live self-willed, self-determined
 - c. There are the agnostics, who, as the atheist "leaves us without God" - they may believe there is a God (creator) but that He cannot and will not be known
 - d. There are "deists" who believe and declare a God, but a God Who does not "interfere" with the creation. He set it into being and leaves it to work its way out (almost wondering Himself what the outcome will be)

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. - Mt. 15:8

C. God can be known as God (creator) in creation (though not known, personally)

1. God's existence and some of His core attributes can be known because of the creation
 - a. Rom. 1:18-22 - God's existence (and work) are made evident in them and to them by "being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse"
 - b. We are told that his "invisible attributes", His "eternal power and divine nature" can be clearly seen because of what was "made" (created)
 - c. Even believers in the "Big Bang" must reach a point of accepting a "cause" - something "pre-time" or time transcendent and with more power than we have the ability to measure
2. Though, as later indicated in anthropology, man is influenced and impaired by sin - interpretations of the natural proofs of creation will be interpreted differently and explained apart from God
3. Still, all of nature will demonstrate and declare God's glory and "handiwork" - Psalm 19
4. These attributes and insights into God as creator and supreme over the universe are not enough to reveal the redemptive plan and be the final means by which God will bring His salvation
 - a. God's work can be seen in all but God is not all - we are not polytheists - all things are not God but all things demonstrate God's work and existence
 - b. Proof of God in nature is enough, though, to hold all guilty and accountable to God

D. So, theology is the created, limited being, studying God and organizing revealed concepts into categories

1. The systematic and categorical study, in itself, is subject to error and cannot be fully trusted
 - a. Only the source of the revealed information from God of God can be fully trusted
 - b. Items of God's greatness will be missed or misunderstood or the full scope of each attribute will surpass our ability to effectively communicate
 - c. This being understood, we approach these studies with caution an utmost sobriety and gravity
 - d. It will not be a place or time for looseness or subjectivity - there will be, at times, speculation and opinion, but both must be identified as such so as not to equate concepts of God derived from finite thinking with divinely revealed truths, descriptions and illustrations of God from His own self
 - e. The outlines, order and structure will never be inspired as the source (the Scripture)

2. But the Bible is not a “book” of sequential doctrines
 - a. The Bible contains all the content, proofs and illustrations for our beliefs
 - b. The goal of any systematic theology should be to organize/categorise similar topics and subjects so as best to get the whole picture on any particular major concept in Scripture - and this collecting and organizing must strive for unbiased contextual handling of the proof texts used
 - c. “If a man adopts a false method, he is like one who takes a wrong road which will never lead him to his destination.” Charles Hodge
3. The study of Theology will involve thinking, reasoning and the intellect
 - a. Many will react to the admission that reasoning and the mind have a key part in theology, but it does and it must - we are not driven by senselessness, feelings, uninformed opinions, or intimidation - all of these change with the “user” and can never offer a solid foundation on which to found one’s life - II Tim. 1:7
 - b. The time will and has come that many (if not most) will not “endure sound doctrine”
 - (1). They will not suffer with sound (uncorrupted) doctrine (organized teaching)
 - (2). They will be driven by personal desires - this is why we seek to discover what Scripture truly says of God with or without my biases or desires dictating accuracy - many react to aspects of theology because they conflict with a personal picture or tradition of what they see God to be
 - (3). These will search out teachers who tell them what they desire to hear
 - (4). These will “turn away their ears” from the truth - refuse to listen, be challenged or learn what God truly reveals of Himself
 - (5). These will veer off the proper course, concluding on “fables” and “myths”
4. The mind and reasoning are only as good as their input - II Tim. 3:15
 - a. As with Timothy, so it is with us - we must learn from the “Holy Scriptures”
 - b. This will be the source of unadulterated wisdom - it is profitable for teaching
 - c. There is an urgent need to be students of the Bible - it should be the core of our learning and all else compared to or governed by its truths - the scriptural concepts are “spiritually discerned” - they will not be naturally discerned
 - d. The mind will, no doubt, be frustrated at times, but will nevertheless be used in the learning and understanding of theology
5. Thinking is not to be looked down upon if it is subservient to faith
 - a. But this faith is not uninformed faith or blind faith
 - b. One of God’s “means” to faith is hearing/understanding His message - Rom. 10:17
 - c. God made communication, speech, writing and all that pertains to them and has chosen these types of communication to reveal Himself to us
 - d. The wisdom (thinking and logic) of the world will not bring it to these revealed conclusions, but God has chosen what will seem foolish to the world, through communicating the message to save those that will believe - I Cor. 1:21
 - e. God’s wisdom is not truly foolish, but since His ways and thoughts are so far above ours, they will seem this way - Isa. 55:8-9 - so even the highest intellect will not begin to “attain” to God, but this does not make an informed intellect wrong
6. It is God’s surpassing our comprehension that will further reveal His being infinite
 - a. The concepts revealed in Scripture will need to be organized, structured just as any other “science” is studied - God gives us creation, but does not provide a “manual” to all its wonders and intricacies - these are done in the sciences and systematic theology is also a “science” (organized learning) of the infinite
 - b. It will never be exhaustive and will never cover the scope of God, but it is no less a “science” - a man may say he will never fully know his wife, but he is instructed to learn her as if a science - I Pet. 3:7

II Timothy 4:3-4

The goal is to maintain an overwhelmed attitude of the impressiveness of God and all areas of exploration into His personality, wisdom and works

7. It's (the studying of God) ultimate purpose, is to develop in us proper worship of God
 - a. As will be discussed and revealed later in the study of man, our innate desire is to worship ourselves or the creations and "greatness" of mankind
 - b. Yet, God Himself, clarifies if there is to be glorying at all, on our part it is to be in knowing and coming to a greater understanding of God - Jer. 9:24
 - c. A true study of God should drive us to our fundamental purpose - "Fear God, and keep His commands, for this is the whole of man." (YLT) - Ec. 12:13
 - d. We must be careful, when using illustrations and other types of pictures and descriptions of God not to allow these limited examples to be perceived as having captured the entire quality, attribute or essence of God
 - e. When using the might/power or the spans of the creation to illustrate the power of God, let us not allow our thoughts to see these as truly qualifying examples and descriptions of His might, however impressive they may be

II. The Perfection Of God (as seen in His attributes)

A. The term "perfect" carries with it the ideas of "entirely without any flaws, defects, or shortcomings", "accurate, exact, or correct in every detail", "thorough; complete; utter", "pure or unmixed"

1. All of these are needed in describing and studying the attributes of God
 - a. Though the term "perfect" is inadequate (less than perfect) to carry the degree, scope or magnitude in the descriptions and language (such as adjectives) used to explain and search out these matters
 - b. When speaking of God's unending (limitless) power it will involve clarifying and seeking to illustrate it being without flaw, precise in its use, completely thorough and unaided by any other thing, being, power or concept (conceived or yet to be conceived)
2. It will be assumed that when working through any of God's attributes, that each is perfect in reference to God and is perfectly demonstrated and utilized by God
 - a. When dealing with God's emotions (as proof of His personality) we do not look upon it as we do our own flawed and often uncontrolled emotions
 - b. We never entertain the idea of God and His works being uninformed, lacking or as in need of growth or refinement - perfection communicates being complete which all "areas" of God are (even His decrees which are yet to come as seen in Rev. 1:1 when clarifying "these things MUST come to pass" - no doubt or speculation is allowed for
 - c. His dealings with us individually and with all of creation will be perfect - Psalm 18:30-32 - All His ways are lacking in nothing including the "path" He works for us
 - d. 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. (RSV) - James 1:17 - we know these are perfect because the source is perfect
 - f. To allow for a flaw (or even change) in God casts doubts upon all of God's attributes

The goal is not to overly humanize the descriptions of God - we cannot think upon Him as a man

B. The Omniscience of God - God knows all

1. Philosophical arguments against this attribute demonstrate the frustration of the finite seeking to explain away this attribute because it cannot be fully comprehended - each can and should be answered

Cantor's Theorem tells us that no matter how large a set we may have, we can always consider a set that is yet larger.

- a. "Cantor's proof that there is no set of all sets. Omniscience, it is said, entails knowledge of the set of all truths. Cantor's proof, however, demonstrates that there is no such set. As there is no such set, it is argued, there can be no omniscient being."
- b. "There are certain facts knowledge of which can only be acquired through certain experiences—knowledge of what it is like to sin, for instance, can only be acquired by sinning—and that some of these experiences, and so some of these items of knowledge, are such that they cannot be had by God."
- c. "If God knows all of our future actions, then the future is fixed, but if the future is fixed, it seems that there is nothing that we can do to change it. The ability to determine our future actions, though, is what constitutes human freedom. Divine foreknowledge, then, seems to preclude the possibility of our being free agents."
- d. "Middle knowledge is knowledge of what free agents would have done had the world been other than it is. As the agents are free, their choice of action cannot be determined by the state

These examples were taken from philosophyofreligion.info

of the world, and so cannot be calculated on that basis. As middle knowledge concerns counterfactual situations, however, neither can their choice of actions be known by observation of the future. With the two possible sources of knowledge ruled out, it seems that middle knowledge is an impossibility.”

2. Biblical answers to these statements - this requires a proper perspective - Isa. 40:12-26

- a. Once we understand our “standing” and perspective before God, we are ready to begin to grapple with the concepts of His omniscience, realizing our limited understanding of all things
 - (1). We do not know what we do not know - we will always have ignorance
 - (2). We do not know all of anything we know - we know parts, not everything of anything
 - (3). To know or understand one thing, I must know and understand another and what we know is as limited as our source - we are dependent
- b. The illustrations of His size, offer an initial perspective - “waters in the hollow of His hand”, “measure the heavens with a span”, “weighs the mountains”, “nations are like a drop from a bucket”, the nations are “regarded by Him as less than nothing” - He is the one we study
- c. So, who can truly “measure” Him - vs. 13 (word for “directed”) - literally, who can measure (mete out, fully break down into understandable and controllable pieces) the Lord?
- d. Who is His teacher and counsellor? - vs. 13-14 - who gives God insight or clarification (details) into what He does not already know - He will never need advice !
- e. The “evidence” (or even concept) of unending sets of numbers (or more to be known) is in harmony with God’s infinite omniscience - it does not need a limit to be said that it can all be known - Cantor’s theorem is proof of God’s omniscience - Psa. 147:5 - “... His understanding is infinite (literally, “without number” or it cannot be numbered)
- f. In Isa.40:28 - “...His understanding is inscrutable” - innumerable (to fully figured out)
- g. To say that certain knowledge can only be had by experience may be true of limited beings, but not by the founder and originator of all knowledge. At best, we borrow knowing and knowledge from God - He does not need experience (as in experiencing sin) to know sin for what it is - His existence defines sin - He does know (experientially) what it is liked to be tempted (Mat. 4 - though without sin) in Christ, and it is stated that we do not have a “high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses” - Heb. 4:14-16
- h. The atheistic counter point listed before that states that man cannot be a “free agent” if God knows all that will happen is truly godless - this point will be discussed at length when dealing with the decrees of God and His sovereignty - the concept of the “freedom of man” is humanistic, attributing more power and ability to the will of man than is true - since God knows definitively all that will happen, then all that will happen is set - thus the argument using “middle knowledge” is pointless though we can assume that since God designed all things and concepts, He must know all that could have happened no matter all the “forks in the road” decisions that have been present in time (in Mt. 11:23, Christ knew what Sodom would have done if they had seen the great works performed in Capernaum)

• Based upon God’s decrees and sovereignty, the “middle knowledge” debate is moot

3. God knows Himself - this is an interesting point realizing He is infinite

- a. “God knows himself, and he only knows himself. This is the first and original knowledge, wherein He excels all creatures. No man doth exactly know himself, much less doth he understand the full nature of a spirit; much less still the nature and perfection of God”
- b. I Cor. 2:11 - only God (His spirit) knows Himself and the Son - Mt. 11:27

4. His knowledge (in detail) of us is also in full

- a. Hebrews 4:13 - all is open and “laid bare” before His eyes
- b. This can be a fearful thought to the ungodly - they would prefer God not to see and know and act as though He does not see - Psa. 94:7-11, Psa. 10:11
- c. As our designer and creator He knows us in detail - Isa. 29:15-16 - can the thing that is formed (by the potter) say to the creator that He has no understanding ?
- d. He knows the number of hairs on our heads - Mt. 10:29-31 - it is a reminder of our value
- e. He realizes our “natural frame of being dust” - Psa. 103:14
- f. He knows perfectly our “way” (path in life - past, present and future) - Job 23:10; Psa. 139:1-4
- g. He knows our thoughts and words before we do

This is our starting point and will always be the best we will ever be on our own

This was “fitting” to have a “high priest” who does not need to offer sacrifices for his own sin - Heb. 7:26-28

It is interesting and sad to note how many churches have bought into this thought also

Stephen Charnock

God does not “get” anything... He has already had it

5. God's knowledge is simultaneous (immediate) versus successive (or linear) - Isa. 46:10
 - a. He knows all there is to be known now, not over time
 - b. He has not nor ever will learn (He being the source of all learning and knowing)
 - c. We need to know one thing before we can learn another... God, being eternal and the creator of all things has always known all things - His knowledge cannot increase!
 - d. This point also teaches us that God's knowledge (knowing) is complete (about anything)
 - e. “Has it ever occurred to you that nothing ever occurred to God?” - to occur means it must come about, while with God it has always been
 - f. This thought has direct impact of our perception of God's perception of us and our circumstances (trials, challenges, worries, aspirations)
6. God's knowledge is intuitive not discursive (having to work/reason it out)
 - a. Much of our learning is “discursive” in that we need to take the time to reason and discuss thoughts to reach conclusions
 - b. God does not need reasoning to come to a conclusion - though there are examples of God reasoning with man to help him learn
 - c. His knowledge is “archetypal” meaning He is the originator from which all else comes - since He formed the model (model or the standard) which dictates all things (such as the laws of the universe, the laws of logic) He then cannot be deficient in His understanding of anything or concept
 - d. “...because in him were the all things created, those in the heavens, and those upon the earth, those visible, and those invisible, whether thrones, whether lordships, whether principalities, whether authorities; all things through him, and for him, have been created, and himself is before all, and the all things in him have consisted.”
 - e. “His archetypal omniscience relates to that in God which first planned and designed the universe before it was brought into being, or made actual by omnipotent creative power. The archetypes of the universe existed from all eternity in the mind of God, and creation was but the exercise of omnipotence by which reality was given to that which omniscience had conceived. Thus, and thus only, arose the order and system which now exists with its perfection of arrangement, its realized purpose, and its stability”
 - f. As with Job in Job 38:3, will we ever be in a position to instruct God? - as God answered Job, where were we when the foundations of the earth were laid?
7. From our frame of reference, God's knowledge is foreknowledge
 - a. He not only knows what has been and what is, but what will be (e.g. Rev. 1:19)
 - b. His knowledge/knowing is not dependent on time - He not only knows it, He sees it!
 - c. Clearly, it is in our best interest to be in a constant state of seeking the guidance of the One Who knows what is coming
8. God is all-wise (knowledge is knowing, while wisdom is discerning) - I Tim. 1:17; Jude 1:25
 - a. It's (wisdom) the outworking of God's knowledge - He knows how to use His knowledge
 - There are many who know much, but do not know what to do with it
 - b. His insight is perfectly used, flawlessly applied !
 - c. In His wisdom and understanding, there is no forgetfulness - Ps. 77:9 - He misses nothing and is perfectly gracious - He is incomparable (Ps. 77:13)
9. God's wisdom is before creation and is to be sought constantly - Pr. 8:32-36
 - a. This chapter demonstrates (illustrates) God's wisdom, using personification
 - b. Focusing (daily) on God's omniscience should stir in us the drive to “listen” and “keep” His wisdom - learning and guarding what we've learned - vs. 32
 - c. It is not to be neglected (avoided, slighted or refused) - vs. 33
 - d. Content is the person that seeks His wisdom daily and consistently - vs. 34
 - e. “Discovery” of God's wisdom is the true discovery of life - vs. 35
 - f. Those slighting (missing) it, hurt themselves - those that stand against it injure themselves as if actively working to hurt themselves - vs. 36
 - g. Those that hate His wisdom “love death” - vs. 36

Col. 1:16-17 (YLT) —

L. S. Chafer —

C. The Omnipotence of God - God is all-powerful, Almighty

1. God is able to do all that is able to be done
 - a. There is no other to limit or restrict His “freedom” and will
 - b. Another idea of His might is self-sufficiency or all-sufficient - He needs no other
 - c. These are summed up in some of God’s titles - as He called Himself to Abraham in Gen. 17:1
 - This was when God reiterated His covenant with Abraham who was 99 years old
 - d. As the Lord asked in Gen. 18:9-15, “Is anything too difficult for the Lord?” - or it could also be rendered, “Is anything to wonderful for the Lord to do?”
 - e. This passage and passages like Jer. 32:27 discount the philosophical counter to the concept of the existence of one who is truly omnipotence
2. The philosophers debate over the possibility of this: below is the synopsis of their argument

a. *The Paradox of Omnipotence*

- (1) *God either can or cannot create a rock that is so heavy that he cannot lift it.*
- (2) *If God can create a rock that is so heavy that he cannot lift it, then God is not omnipotent.*
- (3) *If God cannot create a rock that is so heavy that he cannot lift it, then God is not omnipotent. Therefore:*
- (4) *God is not omnipotent.*
- (5) *If God exists then he is omnipotent. Therefore:*
- (6) *God does not exist.*

These examples were taken
from philosophyofreligion.info

- b. This has actually been the initial premise/example used to debate the idea!
- c. It is important to remember this is the limited in knowledge and power drawing a conclusive judgement on the One who is all-knowing and has all power there is to be had - God can do all that can be done - this is omnipotence. So, the power of God to do all that is possible is unlimited in its doability, possibility and extent
- d. A paradox does not mean there is error. One definition of “paradox” is, “A paradox is an apparently true statement or group of statements that leads to a contradiction or a situation which defies intuition” - often, what appears to be a paradox (contradiction) is actually proof that someone more clever and bright than we has thought it up or produced it
- e. Another working definition of of omnipotence is, “God is able to do all His holy will”

3. So, what is it that God cannot do and does this counter the meaning of omnipotence?

- a. God cannot lie (He epitomizes truth) - He is Truth and the source of truth
- b. God cannot change (He does not need to) - to do so would be to reveal He was not perfect - His dealings with us may change, but He has not changes
- c. God cannot sin (it is opposite to His nature)
- d. God cannot fail (this would suggest weakness if He could)
- e. God cannot lose control (over self and creation)
- f. God cannot be limited by another or circumstances (He is sovereign)
- g. God cannot fear (there are no threats to God)
- h. God cannot learn/improve (perfection cannot grow or lessen)
- i. God cannot be deceived (He knows the “thoughts and intents of the heart”)
- j. God cannot die or cease to exist (He has always existed) - He cannot not “be”

He cannot make Himself
what He is not

4. This is all the more evident in comparison with us (our power and even imagined power)

- a. Eph. 3:20 - “To him who, through his power which is at work within us, is able to do far more than anything that we can ask or conceive...”-- (TCNT)
- b. His power and ability goes beyond our comprehension - we often limit God to our limited imaginations - His power and knowledge surpasses this!
- c. This is why Isa. 26:3 is true, “Thou wilt keep [him] in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee.” (mind - “imagination”)
- d. Young’s Literal Translation brings it out even clearer, “An imagination supported Thou fortifiest peace--peace! For in Thee it is confident.” - our imaginations, thoughts and hopes need to be focused on the limitless power of God to be truly confident and stable
- e. “Jesus can create “perfect peace” within thy mind, though storms of trial rage without (Isa 57:19; Mr 4:39); as a city kept securely by a strong garrison within, though besieged without” JFB

f. "We can do very little. God can do whatever He wills. We, beyond very narrow limits, must use means to accomplish our ends. With God, means are unnecessary. He wills and it is done." Charles Hodge

"... nothing is to difficult — for You" NASB

g. "Ah, Lord Jehovah, lo, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power, and by Thy stretched-out arm; there is nothing too wonderful for Thee:" (YLT) - Jer. 32:17 (also vs. 27)

h. "But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever he pleased." (ASV) - Ps. 115:3

omnipotence must have free will — • This again points back to omnipotence being defined by will more than just ability

i. When God has defeated the last of earth's greatest "God-enemies" (Babylon), the rejoicing and declarations of God's power by those looking on is compared to loud, rushing waters and thundering saying, ".. Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." (KJV) - Rev. 19:6

• As seen in Jeremiah and by this example also, God will often allow other powers to be demonstrated and be elevated to power and position, just to then demonstrate His power against and over them

5. So, all power there is to be had is had by God - Mt. 28:18; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 2:8

a. Sin, failure and the power to limit Himself would all be the possibility of weakness, which is impossible for omnipotence! To "have the ability" to do these things would be in direct contradiction to this attribute, making it not exist/be

b. This limitless power is under the jurisdiction of His will, His character (who He is) - thus, He cannot be who He is not!

c. The greatest of His power is seen in Christ and His outworking of the power - as mentioned in the passage in Colossians 1, all things were made by Him, and by Him all things "consist" - ".. to place together and here to cohere, to hold together. The word repeats the statements in verse Col 1:16, especially that in the form *ektistai*. Christ is the controlling and unifying force in nature. The Gnostic philosophy that matter is evil and was created by a remote aeon is thus swept away." RWP

d. All power there is to be had in Heaven and in earth is Christ's - Mt. 28:18

6. Paul's encouragement to the Ephesians was along these lines - Eph. 1:18-23

a. That "the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened" to 3 distinct things:

The expectations the believers should have in being called of God - His power to "deliver"

(1). The hope of His calling - ".. it would be an inestimable privilege to be made fully acquainted with the benefits of the Christian hope, and to be permitted to understand fully what Christians have a right to expect in the world of glory." Barnes

His resources to "deliver"

(2). "...the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" - either the inheritance we have in Christ, or more likely, we are His inheritance - we are the "profit" from His work

His power above all other powers that might seek to hinder His work

(3). "...the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" - surpassing, meaning it goes beyond what we would see to be limits - this, believers must see to keep their focus and faith where it belongs - if God is limited by what we see and perceive, we will not be looking for His surpassing great power to be at work, which has direct affects on our actions or lack of them!

b. These are in accordance (caused by) "the working of the strength of His might"

(1). "The excellency of faith is declared by the effects, because the mighty power of God is set forth and shown in them." GBN

(2). This is the same strength (power) that raised Christ from the dead and set Him at God's right hand in Heaven (death, our greatest known enemy on earth, and the place of highest power and authority at God's right hand)

"..far above all rule and authority and power.." NASB

(3). This place is, "...far above all principality, and authority, and might, and lordship, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in the coming one;" YLT

• Not just above, but far above all powers, rules and authorities!

c. And by His all-powerfulness, God put ALL things in subjection under His feet

(1). None is greater in authority and power than Christ

(2). This same one is the "head" of the church - which is called "His body" - just as our bodies fulfill the commands of the head, so the church will be the outworking of God's power, strength and authority on this earth - the possibilities of how this will and can be done are beyond our comprehension - thus the necessity to live by faith!

7. Practically speaking, omnipotence is in reference to God's... - Ps. 62:11; 68:34
- Strength - His ability to do all His will without effective opposition
 - Security - His lack of all forms of fear and intimidation
 - Majesty - His awesomeness realized as His might is demonstrated
 - Praise - The admiration drawn out as His power is exhibited
 - Boldness - God, being perfect and effectively "un-opposable" does what He desires, when He desires it and how He desires it
 - Control - Having all-power He must have all control
 - Freedom - Having all power, He is the only one uncontrolled by external influences
 - Authority - In light of His all-powerfulness, none can be above Him in any way
 - Endless - "All power" is the source of power and does not diminish (no fatigue)
8. So, how do created elements affect/frustrate omnipotence?

- Questioning it, does not change or weaken it - it does not cause it to not be
 - Weaker powers do not dictate to higher powers
- The anger of man does not intimidate God
- The passage of time does not wear God down in any degree
- Blindness or ignorance to this attribute of God does not discount it

D. The Eternity (infinity) and Immutability (unchangeableness) of God

- God has always been, always is and always will be without change in His person, personality, might, will, perfection, timelessness, wisdom and knowledge
 - Nothing comes before God and nothing comes after since there is no "before" and "after" God
 - This is what is expressed in the name He gave to Moses, "I AM THAT I AM" - Ex. 3:14
 - This also identifies the self-existence of God - He was not created and has never not been
 - "This signifies the real being of God, his self-existence, and that he is the Being of beings; as also it denotes his eternity and immutability, and his constancy and faithfulness in fulfilling his promises, for it includes all time, past, present, and to come; and the sense is, not only I am what I am at present, but I am what I have been, and I am what I shall be, and shall be what I am." John Gill on Ex. 3:14
 - He is the one true fixed point of reference for the universe and beyond - "constants" are needed to determine time and space placement - we know where and when we are in comparison to these so-called constants - trying to remove God from thought, philosophy and society is like trying to remove the absolutes and constants used to govern and measure all these
 - In James 1:17 we see this clearly spelled out, "Every good thing given us, and every perfect gift, is from above, and comes down to us from the Maker of the Lights in the heavens, who is himself never subject to change or to eclipse." (TCNT)

(1). This is contrasted to we being carried away with our fleeting lusts - vs. 14

(2). Our reactions to God's activity (or our perceiving His inactivity) do not dictate what or how God does His righteous plans- vs. 19-20

(3). Be hearers (learners) and doers (obedient) of His unchanging standard - vs. 21-22

Mal. 3:6 f. In His rebuke to Israel, He reminded them, "For I Jehovah change not, and ye, sons of Jacob, are not consumed." (DBY)

Isa. 46:10 — g. He does not change because His always "is" - before God, all that has happened, is happening and will happen has happened, seeing He knows (first-hand) the end from the beginning

2. Being eternal and immutable, all of God's attributes will also be eternal and unchangeable

- All we know changes and has time limits, but this is not so with God - having always been, He will always be as He is and has been!
- Ps. 90:1-6 - Before all, God was and the passage of time has no power over God, "Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."
 - Literally, from infinity before time to infinity beyond time You are...
- This is why He is to be our foundation for life, our direction of life, anchor in the waves of change, retreat when faced with our own variableness and our fortress when confronted with our weakness and fearfulness

- d. Because God is unchangeable, His word is also unchanging - Psalm 119:89-90 - “For ever, O Jehovah, Thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth” (ASV)
 - e. “Because no one should esteem God’s word according to the changes of things in this world, he shows that it abides in heaven, and therefore is immutable.” GBN
 - f. We fully rely upon Scripture since it is from God who is “from everlasting” - His having always been, assures the consistency and timelessness (and timeliness) of His word always - as in His love, mercy, grace, justice, wisdom, might and on
3. He is the “ever fixed point” - Mal. 3:6
- a. He, being “Jehovah” (the “self -existent one”) has not, does not nor will change
 - b. Like an enormous rock being surrounded and struck by the ever-changing waters and waves around it - while all is moving and being moved, it remains
 - c. No matter where we go in life, thinking, philosophy and affections, He is the “point of reference” to measure/determine where we have gone, been and are heading
 - d. Knowing this, we compare all that we know and seek to understand to His word - time away from His word and its unchanging truths, is like letting go of our anchored point in life - we then are swayed and stray
4. His will never changes (also being eternal) - Heb. 6:13-20
- a. The example of this passage is describing when God was making His promise to Abraham and could not “swear” by any greater than Himself “He swore by Himself” - a promise affixed to Himself would most assuredly stand and be kept seeing He is absolute and unchangeable - this is why our stands and standing need to be on Him, seeing all else changes and fades
 - b. To us as recipients of His promise find our confidence in His immutability - as in verse 17 and 18, our assurance rests on two unchangeable things (those being His promise and His oath) and thus concluding that it is impossible for God to lie
 - c. This hope (expectation) is the “anchor” of our soul” - vs. 19 - because of who God is, His promises are “sure and steadfast” like an anchor in solid ground beneath the moving waters
 - d. This anchor goes beyond the “solids” of this life and enter past the “veil” right into the presence of God (the Holy of Holies) by our High priest, Christ - picture the chain of this anchor of our hope as leading right to God Himself - from the earth, from time into eternity, timelessness! - if God is seen as changing then our hope is unreliable (as an anchor that is hooked into a moving object) - one of the dangers being that when we realize we have moved and all our life “measurements” have been based upon a moving standard, it may be too late
 - e. God must be seen and eternal, unchanging for us to then see His purpose as also unchanging
5. “What, then, art Thou, O my God--what, I ask, but the Lord God? For who is Lord but the Lord? or who is God save our God Most high, most excellent, most potent, most omnipotent; most piteous and most just; most hidden and most near; most beauteous and most strong, stable, yet contained of none; unchangeable, yet changing all things; never new, never old; making all things new, yet bringing old age upon the proud and they know it not; always working, yet ever at rest; gathering, yet needing nothing; sustaining, pervading, and protecting; creating, nourishing, and developing; seeking, and yet possessing all things. Thou lovest, and burnest not; art jealous, yet free from care; repentest, and hast no sorrow; art angry, yet serene; changest Thy ways, leaving unchanged Thy plans; recoverest what Thou findest, having yet never lost; art never in want, whilst Thou rejoicest in gain; never covetous, though requiring usury? That Thou mayest owe, more than enough is given to Thee; yet who hath anything that is not Thine? Thou payest debts while owing nothing; and when Thou forgivest debts, lovest nothing. Yet, O my God, my life, my holy joy, what is this that I have said? And what saith any man when He speaks of Thee? Yet woe to them that keep silence, seeing that even they who say most are as the dumb?” Augustine
6. What about the passages that seem to indicate God changing (at least in His mind)?
- a. First, we must take note of the passages that indicate that God does not change nor is He subject to change (or “repent”)
- Numbers 23:19 — b. “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither a son of man, that he should repent. Shall he say and not do? and shall he speak and not make it good?” (DBY)

We are creatures of change and fickleness, so from our vantage point things seem to change, yet from God's, nothing changes - if I walk away and come back to Him from a "different angle", He may have appeared to change but Has always been the same

- c. In I Samuel 15:10-31 we have what appears to be conflicting ideas. One, though answers the other. In verse 11, He expresses "regret" to Samuel for setting up Saul as king, and yet Samuel then clarifies in verse 29 that God is not like a man in that He would change His mind
 - "God in his eternal counsel never changes or repents, as in 1Sa 15:29, though he seems to us to repent when anything goes contrary to his temporal election." GBN
 - d. God's "repentance" is not like man's, as He has no wrong path or decisions from which to change: and seeing as He knows the future, God already knows what He, Himself, will do - so how can He "repent" (truly change His mind) already knowing what would happen?
 - For God to stop and have to "change" His mind and purpose, indicates error and a lack of control and foreknowledge
 - e. As with man in Gen 6, man would be destroyed (His plan to emphasize holiness & redirect mankind) - So, yes, God's dealings change as a person driving a car takes many different turns which are already mapped out, not as one ignorant of where he is going, but as one going the best way to go!
 - f. His dealings with man change, but all according to His unchanging purpose and plan
 - g. "Could the imagination of man picture a situation before any creative act of God was wrought, when God, as it were, had before Him an infinite variety of possible plans and blueprints from which to choose - each and every one of which represented a possible program of divine action as far reaching and elaborate as the one now being executed - it would be reasonable and honoring to God to conclude that the present plan as ordained and as it is being achieved is, and in the end will prove to be, the best plan and purpose that could have been devised by infinity wisdom... the present plan is as perfect as the Author." L.S. Chafer
 - f. The term "repent" is also used anthropomorphically of God
 - (1). It communicates God's emotion (not as if surprised, but illustrating His view/grief of sin) The root idea of this word is "to sigh," as in sorrow
 - (2). Just because God permits something, does not mean He endorses it
 - g. We could legitimately use the phrase, "I regret that this happened, but I knew it would happen and it had to happen to prove a point."
 - h. Progressive revelation may also make God appear to change His purpose or plan - one of the benefits of prophecy, is to demonstrate that God has already worked out the end - Eph. 1:9
7. "Immutability is not stereotyped by sameness, but by impossibility of deviation by one hair's-breadth from the course which is best" - E. Bancroft
- a. We are learning more about what He has always been - as in a marriage, one may think that the other has changed, when in reality truth has been revealed in who each other really are
 - b. God does not change, but our growing perception does
 - c. "All change must be to the better or the worse. But God cannot change to the better, since He is absolutely perfect; neither can He change to the worse, for the same reason. He is exalted above all causes and even the possibility of change. He can never be wiser, more holy, more just, more merciful, more truthful, nor less so. Nor do His plans or purposes change." - Thiesen
8. Psalm 102:25-27 - "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. (RSV)
- a. All things change but God Himself - there are those (process theology) that believe for us to have significance, then God must change and "grow" in the experiences and happenings of life. In this, they believe we find our significance and that if we cannot change, add to or influence God in any way then we are of no significance.
 - b. This line of thought fails to consider that our significance is found in God's estimation of us - God defines (absolutely) what is of value and significance - our goal in life, then, is to do all we can to learn of God's will, purpose and ways and act in submissive harmony with them and seek to find our purpose in that!
 - c. As alluded to earlier, this attribute directly affects the other attributes (or at least our perception of them) - we must accept this to fully believe that God's love, grace, mercy, goodness, justice, perfection and so on will also be unchangeable

9. “God’s unchanging holiness requires him to treat the wicked differently from the righteous. When the righteous become wicked, his treatment of them must change. The sun is not fickle or partial because it melts the wax but hardens the clay, - the change is not in the sun but in the objects the sun shines upon.” Strong’s Systematic Theology
10. So, seeing God is eternal, we conclude that..
 - a. God will remain the same - He is the ultimate object of faith - Rev. 4:8 (was, is, is to come)
 - b. What God determined to do, He will do (His counsels, purposes and will do not change as they have always been the same)
 - c. Time was created and is not an enemy to us - eternity lies ahead of us!

III. Some of the “Moral” Attributes of God Directed to Us

- A. Many of the attributes of God are best seen in their relation to us personally - how God looks at us, treats us, punishes, chastens, pities and so on. These are not only described and revealed, but we can see them in action and depend upon them and when they are not seen or they are doubted and questioned, they can produce negative reactions and lead to despair, bitterness, fear and depression
 1. Our morality and our definition of it comes through God Himself
 - a. He is the standard we follow and the “judge” of what is truly right and wrong
 - b. We count on His “morals” to face all areas of life both joyful and grievous
 2. We derive how we should think and act based upon these
 - a. If these are not known or are distorted, our morality will decline and fail
 - b. The distortion either by addition or subtraction of these morals creates immorality
- B. The Goodness of God - Ps. 34:7, I Pe. 2:3
 1. The word “good” carries with it several idea, the core of which is “approved”
 - a. The key when dealing with the definition of good or goodness is to identify who is the standard of what is approved, best, better, useful and so on
 - b. “..it answers in all parts to the ideal.” Berkhof
 - c. God Himself defines and sets what is to be “approved” and what is best and He demonstrates these by what He does and what (and why) He chooses
 2. As stated in Psalm 34:7, David encouraged the reader to “taste and see” that He is good - realize firsthand that God is the ultimate in what we could want and strive for - understanding this, we can see more clearly why the Psalmist also describes God as his “portion” - Psalm 119:57
 - a. He is and does what is best and what would be “approved” by us if we saw all from His perspective
 - b. Paul identifies this fact in Romans 12:2 when we are encouraged to give ourselves over totally for His purposes with the intent that we might discover that His will is “good” and acceptable - it is right and truly well-pleasing
 3. It is also to be acknowledged that all that God does is worthy of approval - it is good
 - a. As in Romans 8:28, in conjunction with us, all that God does (things being worked together) are for our good, we the ones who “love Him” and are “the called according to His purpose”
 - b. Only God is truly “good” - Luke 18:19 - “No one is good except God alone”
 - c. Seeing that God is good and goodness, He should be our chief pursuit when seeking “good”
 - d. All we seek should be compared to His idea of “good”
 4. It is the ultimate realization of God’s goodness at work in His mercy and grace that leads us to repent - Rom. 2:4
 - a. Our most significant changes come when we become most aware of God’s goodness to us
 - b. Even in the greatest times of sorrow, we look to Him as being our steady source of goodness when all around seems to be nothing but “badness”
 - c. When other sources of goodness are sought, our heart and focus will follow only to disappointment and disillusionment
 5. It is this underlying goodness of God that “sets the stage” for the other traits that we look to for hope and encouragement (His love, mercy and grace)
 - a. Because He is good, He loves (seeing as selflessness is good)
 - b. Because He is good, He has mercy (seeing as withholding wrath from those He loves is good)
 - c. Because He is good, He gives grace (see as how enabling power to those He loves is good)

6. His goodness is seen in His attention to us - Psa. 8:4
 - a. Considering the magnificence of God's creation in comparison to our smallness
 - b. It is a marvel and wonder to think that God thinks and cares for us and has given us "dignity" and responsibility over His creation
7. We stand in opposition to this attribute of God when we..
 - a. Reason against the "ideal" - we may not know or fully understand the ideals in any situation, but it should be (in light of this characteristic) what we look for first
 - Part of Paul's point in I Cor. 6:12 (profitable or worthwhile)
 - b. Seek to excuse what is not "approved" of God - when we seek to justify what is not known to be right or what we clearly know is wrong (or we help others to reason around what is wrong)
 - c. Look upon God as an enemy - This was part of Satan's strategy in Genesis 3 (thinking that there was wrong in God or His doings) - this is an area we especially need to be conscious when we are in a place or time of suffering
 - d. Refuse to repent - stubbornness in iniquity is a despising of God's goodness - as again in Romans 2:4 - we do not want to think lightly of His goodness
 - e. Fail to be gracious and "useful" to others (following God's example) - even in our speech we seek to follow this example - Col. 4:6
 - f. Believe ourselves to be more gracious than God - many react to what they perceive to be the whole picture of what God is doing, and since they would not have been so "harsh" or "cruel", they allow the idea of their goodness being greater than God's
 - God's goodness to us is also seen in what He withholds from us, takes from us or holds us back from something - as David acknowledged this in Psalm 119:71
 - g. Do not look upon the workings of God as "approved" to us (good to us) - we should not question the goodness (lovingkindness) of God - this is even to be part of our building of the lives and faith of others, reminding that God is always good - Psalm 52:1
 - Psalm 73 is a good overview of the internal conflict we may have in our perception of the goodness of God at work (verses 25-26 demonstrate the proper realization)
8. All His other "moral" attributes are "built" off of this attribute - His holiness, grace and mercy are to be defined in light of His goodness (His rightness in the true ideal)
 - a. When His attributes are defined or practically defined without considering His goodness, they will be misused, misdefined and misapplied
 - b. "His wisdom might contrive against us, his power bear too hard upon us; one might be too hard for an ignorant, and the other too mighty for an impotent creature; his holiness would scare an impure and guilty creature, but his goodness conducts them all for us, and makes them all amiable to us; whatever comeliness they have in the eye of a creature, whatever comfort they afford to the heart of a creature, we are obliged for all to his goodness." - Charnock
 - c. When God demonstrated His glory to Moses, He called His glory "goodness" and mentioned that Moses would see this glory as He passed by - Ex. 33:17-34:7
 - (1). In the glory of His goodness, He declared His mercy and graciousness on those whom He chooses to demonstrate it
 - (2). As God "passed by" Moses, and in 43:6, declares the gracious aspect of His goodness and then in verse 7 also clarifies the holy side of His goodness in the punishment of the wicked
9. As seen in the account of creation and the fall, God's goodness is defied and hidden by sin
 - a. God called his creation "good exceedingly" (very good) - Gen. 1:31
 - b. It was ultimately the questioning of God's goodness that brought man to sin
 - c. Since the fall, God's goodness is often unseen or unrecognized - so it is with us, that when we focus upon sin and our thinking and perception are blinded by it, we do not see His goodness at work and may even despise it when confronted with it!
 - d. As described in Psalm 27:13-14, our strength and resolve are dependent on seeing the goodness of the Lord when opposition is all around us - recognizing His goodness provides the strength to wait on the Lord and be of good courage - He then strengthens our hearts

It is an exclamation - If I had not believed to see God's goodness while I live, what would have become of me?

10. His goodness may be unrecognized by us also because we equate it with our situation being comfortable, or without contradiction and stress

a. Belief in His goodness enforces our confidence in Him

b. Though, He will not be considered “good” in the eyes of those that are His enemies -

Nahum 1:2-8 - His goodness is seen by those who seek refuge in Him

11. Next to be discussed is the outgrowth of God’s goodness - His love, mercy and grace

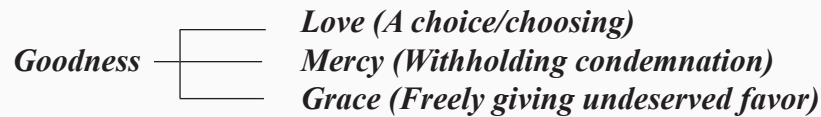
a. His love is an outgrowth of His goodness (being what is ideal/best, approved) - if He was not the essence of goodness He would not love

b. If He did not love, He would not demonstrate mercy

c. If there was not mercy, there would be no impartation of His grace and we would be totally without hope in this life and eternity

d. “Having treated of the love, grace, mercy, and long-suffering of God, it will be proper to take some notice of his goodness, from whence they all proceed; for that God loves any of his creatures in the manner he does, bestows favours upon them, shews mercy to them, and bears much with them, is owing to the goodness of his nature.” John Gill

God has been called, “The goodness of goodness”



e. This goodness is under the guidance of His Omniscience, Omnipotence and Perfection so it is applied and maintained without flaw and without end - to question His goodness and How He applies it to question His other attributes

C. The Love of God - I John 4:8,16; Rom. 5:8

1. The term for God’s type of love used in the New Testament has the common meaning of “benevolence” and/or affection which has its source in the choice of God versus an almost unpredictable and undefinable warm feeling towards someone I find attractive or appealing

a. This cannot be the love that describes God as His love is more than an attribute, it is part of His essence (Who and what He is)

b. God is described as being love - love (outward focused affection for the good of another)

2. “The Divine love is commonly regarded as a species of amiable weakness, a sort of good-natured indulgence; it is reduced to a mere sickly sentiment, patterned after human emotion. Now the truth is that on this, as on everything else, our thoughts need to be formed and regulated by what is revealed thereon in Holy Scripture.” Pink

• God’s love cannot be reduced to the same concept as human feelings which fluctuate with internal and external influences (changing) - God does not change, neither can His love

3. What in us does God love? “The love of God finds nothing in man, but creates in him what He loves. The love of man proceeds from His well-beloved.” Martin Luther

a. God needs nothing so He is described as “..eternally giving of Himself to others” - Grudem

b. It is His choosing to give, it is the core of the definition of His love - as in our redemption, He gives us the righteousness of Christ by His grace

c. He loves us because of Himself, not because of us!

4. What then, is love (as God demonstrates is)? - I Cor. 13:4-8 - This passage is often referred to as “the love chapter” and the word for love is the same as is used when referring to God’s love - in the KJV it is translated “charity” which better pictures the motive of love

a. Love is patient (long suffering) - it bears with those offensive

b. Love is kind - gentle and useful to another (gracious - showing grace)

c. Love does not envy - envy is exhibited when one does not want the best for another (literally being zealous against someone) - God provides what is best for us freely

d. Love is not arrogant - God is clearly above us but condescends to us to save and befriend us

e. Love does not act unbecomingly (indecently, in a manner deserving reproach)

f. Love does not seek its own (is not self-focused) - God’s love is exhibited to us while we were His enemies and fully deserving judgement and neglect

- g. Love does not become exasperated - literally “cutting along side” - the idea is to become so irritated that one is impatient, outraged, inflamed, resentful and rejecting of the other
- h. Love does not take account or inventory of the evil done to it. It literally does not “impute” evil to the recipient of its care - it does not keep track of offenses
- i. Love does not take delight in the failures of those it is directed - It is genuinely out for the best for others and will demonstrate disappointment over sin versus rejection or condemnation
- j. In contrast to the previous, love rejoices “with” the truth - it realizes that the truth of any matter is better than flattery and supposed deception for the better of someone
- “They who are under the influence of that love rejoice that good is done, and the truth defended and advanced..” Barnes
- k. Love is identified as “bearing” or “covering” all things - there are at least 2 ideas: one, that love is demonstrated by not revealing the flaws and failures of others and the other meaning that love bears with circumstances and is not identified by complaining.
- (1). “Literally said of holding fast like a watertight vessel; so the charitable man contains himself in silence from giving vent to what selfishness would prompt under personal hardship.” JFB
 - (2). Love is not a complainer! - it is not out to openly display faults but deals with them
- l. Love does not deal with the recipient with an air of mistrust or suspicion - it anticipates the best from another - in we (as those in Christ) it would be the outworking of sanctification - the “trust” in my motives and actions becomes genuine and not fictitious
- m. Love, even at the times when the “belief” in its recipient is in doubt, still “hopes all things” expecting the change and growth (again, not with unwarranted expectation, but in full confidence (as a parent will set an unstoppable focus to turn a child around, not even considering potential failure))
- n. Love is identified as “bearing under” all things - in contrast to patience, this is bearing with not just individuals but circumstances and situations. God’s love does not falter in the least when situations (even caused by me) seem to be against Him - it does not falter under pressure!
- o. Love does not “fail” - it does not lessen in any degree nor does it go away - Romans 8:35-39
5. So, this love of God can be defined as willful unconditional affection expressed in giving (the opposite being that which is conditioned upon receiving, based more on feeling rather than on a deliberate act of the will)
- a. It is defined/evidenced by looking to the undeservedness of its recipients - us!
 - b. It is demonstrated and proven by its patience and long suffering
 - c. It is proven to be this in its forgiveness
 - d. It is identified by its remarkable attention to the “problem” and the great cost of the solution
 - e. We are given value in the fact that God cherishes us who are unlovely without His love
6. There was this love before the creation
- a. Seeing as it is part of God’s character (who He is), to say that love had to come only when creation came about is to then add something to God (indicating He would not have been perfect) - this also makes love defined only by its object and not by the goodness of God
 - b. God loves because of who He is and not because of those who need or would appreciate it
 - c. The creation itself (including mankind) is a result of His love - John 3:16 - “For God so loved the κόσμος ..” (the creation), “..that He gave ..”
7. One of the supreme pictures of God’s love (willful unconditional affection expressed in giving) illustrated is found in Hosea
- a. “..Hosea clearly recognizes the flowing forth of divine love at the heart of the election of Israel and the Covenant. When represents Yahwe as a man wooing an unworthy woman in defiance of convention, law and reason, he makes it clear that he understands that no legal forms or guarantees can adequately set forth God’s relationship to his people. He himself must love his adulterous wife as Yahwe loves the children of Israel.. the national existence was only maintained by an unfathomable divine love which to normal understanding must appear grotesque.” Gerhard Kittel (on the concept of love (God’s love) in the Old Testament)
 - b. This is highlighted in Hosea 3:1, when after separation because of her immorality, Hosea is told to take her again and love her

- c. Part of the purpose of the entire illustration was to demonstrate God's unconditional love for the one He had chosen
- d. This unconditional love was out for Israel's best by first buying "her" back and leading her to repentance (His goodness doing so) - see Romans 2:4

Value is found in being loved of God not in God loving our value to Him

- She had apparently become enslaved and was purchased back at half the price of a slave and for some grain - she was considered to be of low value and was still the focus of her husband ("beloved of her friend")
- e. As illustrated here and all throughout Scripture, God's love is selfless (not pivoting on the potential opinions of others or the value placed upon His object of love by popular opinion, but by taking the lowest, that which is rejected by others, and making it His love)
 - This is in direct contrast to man's love - man loves to receive, to impress, to be satisfied and because he sees value to himself in the "transaction" - thus the love of man fluctuates based upon externals and changes - He loves us because He chose to do it and since He does not change, His love of us does not and cannot change!
- f. The unchangeableness of His love is clear as described in Rom. 8:35-39
- g. One of the best summary descriptions of God's love is in I John 4:10 - "His love is seen in this - not in our having loved God, but in his loving us and sending his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (TCNT) - He initiates!

8. As determined upon by much scrutiny at the Counsel of Dansville on the attributes of God, one of the best words in the English language that captures best the essence of God's love is the word "Altruism"

The opposite being egotism

- a. How is Altruism defined? - "A selfless concern for others; unselfishness" usually involving a cost to one's self to exhibit this concern or affection - its exercise will often appear to be "risky" or without purpose in the eyes of those watching
- b. It is important to remember that God loves because He is good and not to look upon it as though He loves to gain something for Himself (as He needs nothing) - His love is part of who He is and we are the beneficiaries of it not the cause of it - we ascribe too much credit to ourselves when we entertain the thought that we are the reason and cause of God's love in creation - He is selfless in His attention to us because He is good, just as He is holy and demonstrates judgement on sin because He is good
- c. One of the distinguishing clarifications on the Altruism is found in Wikipedia - "Altruism can be distinguished from a feeling of loyalty and duty. Altruism focuses on a motivation to help others or a want to do good without reward, while duty focuses on a moral obligation towards a specific individual... Pure altruism is giving without regard to reward or the benefits of recognition."
- d. God is not "duty bound" to love.. He does so because He chooses out of His own good will!

Altruism is derived from the French "*autre*" which is derived from the Latin "*alter*" both meaning "other"

9. What if we compromise the definition or the concept of this attribute of God?

If love is perceived as a moral obligation, then we will typically conclude that God is obliged to demonstrate this type of love to all - making it no longer a choice

- a. If we make love for God a moral duty, then He is obliged to love us to be right versus God choosing to do so because of His kindness and rightness - this is the basis of those questioning God by starting with the words, "How could a loving God...?" - this is the source of those seeing God as flawed or cruel (immoral) and either resting on that concept or scrambling to formulate a compromising answer
- b. If we make ourselves the cause of God's altruism then we place ourselves as well in a means and cause of our salvation
- c. If we reduce this concept to simply an affection or emotion, then we leave an "opening" for this feeling to be conditional and fluctuating upon our actions at any given time (e.g. that God loves me when I do right and does not when I do wrong)
- d. If we reduce it to the concept that God was lonely or needing affection, we introduce the concept that God is dependent and not complete in Himself - He would need us
- e. And, to compromise this idea would be to take away from the freedom of God to do what is best in accordance with His will - we must be careful not to place love above His righteousness

God does not compromise His holiness to love us

10. It is essential to understand and accept this attribute of God as it lays the foundation and motivation for our pursuits of altruism - since we do not have the limitless perspective of God, when we look to demonstrate this trait towards others, we must look upon them in their potential in the hands of God versus just where they are presently (especially with our enemies) - though, we also remember that this pursuit is never an "excuse" to compromise His truth as He is loved above all others!

11. This love of God is not universally applied (to every person) and His sovereign application of it is often startling to the casual observer, causing them to seek another explanation of an entirely different interpretation of it altogether
 - a. This stems from a presupposition that man (in general) is worthy of pity and love
 - b. This stems from ignorance of our innate condition before God - sinful and rebellious by nature
 - c. Man is not worthy of pity, love or any other good thing which then astounds the informed observer at the greatness of such a concept and at the greatness of such an application !

12. Concluding thoughts on this attribute of God

His love was applied to bring glory to His grace

- a. His love for us is seen in His choosing and predetermining our lives - "...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Eph. 1:4-6
- b. God's love is everlasting and His demonstration of it "draws" the one loved - "...I have loved you with and everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness" (or it is also translated that God "draws out" His lovingkindness to them)
- c. God's love is not demonstrated to us because of our position nor for our standing in this world- "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples" Deut. 7:7
- d. His love towards us is not just to be admired in light of our unworthiness, but also in the quality and results of His love toward us while we live in this sinful, decaying world - His goodness is seen in the unrestricted joy and contentment we can experience this side of eternity
 - This is a good trait for us to "track" in our constant fight against discouragement and our temptation to wield pessimism - all we have to appreciate and know to appreciate is from Him
- e. Because God loves He shows mercy to us - "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)," - Eph. 2:4-5

D. The Mercy of God - Luke 6:36; I Pet. 1:3; Ex. 33:19; Ps. 118:1-4, 29

1. There are a few words that are used in discussing and describing the mercy of God - both having to do with compassion and kindness directed at those in need (misery)

To better grasp the idea of God's mercy, we must be better acquainted with our sinful, wretched and helpless condition before God realizing that His love and mercy are not deserved on our part in the least

- a. It is commonly seen as "pity" and compassion and has well been described (in light of His holiness) that mercy is God not giving us what we deserve in contrast to grace which is God giving us what we do not deserve
- b. In Exodus 33:19 it is describing His compassion being directed at those He chooses to direct it
- c. In I Peter 1:3 it is God's compassion that regenerates us
- d. In Psalm 118 it is describing the kindness (showing Himself merciful) as enduring forever
- e. In describing the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, the lid over the Ark of the Covenant was described as the "Mercy Seat" - a lid that represented a place of atonement or expiation recognizing the existence of their sin and dealing with it
- f. Mercy is God's recognition of our miserable state and in His love for us (as described in the previous point on this attribute) demonstrates mercy to us (not imputing our sins upon us) - "blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." - Rom. 4:8

2. God sees the sinful helpless state and intervenes by first not sending us straight to an eternal Hell
 - a. There is a sense in which God has mercy upon all that live as seen in His patience with those that are evil, though this patience is for another purpose as described in Romans 9:22-23
 - b. These "vessels of wrath" that experience the patience of God are not truly the recipients of God's mercy in that they have been "prepared for destruction"
 - c. Those in Christ are described as "vessels of mercy" - He is patient with the evil-doers with the purpose to show His glory to those He has prepared beforehand for glory - His patience is seen in that He did not destroy man from the start. Instead, He has waited for we, the vessels of mercy, to be born and have the privilege to see His glory at work in His merciful plan of salvation

3. "All the world tastes of his sparing mercy, those who hear the gospel partake of his inviting mercy, the saints live by his saving mercy, are preserved by his upholding mercy, are cheered by his consoling mercy, and will enter heaven through his infinite and everlasting mercy." Taken from Treasury of David - Psalms 103:8 - this is a good demonstration of the varying "applications" of God's mercy
 - a. One aspect (as mentioned in point 2) is God's "sparing" - not bringing immediate judgment
 - b. The second aspect of mercy is the "offer of salvation" being God's invitational mercy
 - c. The third, salvation comes to His "saints" by His saving mercy
 - d. Throughout life, we are preserved by His upholding mercy
 - e. Through troubles, He demonstrates His "consoling" mercy (we don't deserve encouragement but God provides it still!)
 - f. When in eternity, it will be a demonstration of His infinite mercy
4. Traditionally, mercy is defined as "God not giving us what we deserve" and grace defined as "God giving us what we do not deserve"
 - a. We deserve justice but when God "legally" (meeting His own demands) imputes to us His righteousness, He does not impose upon us what we truly deserve
 - b. God's mercy, as with His love, is not universally applied
5. Jonah was discouraged when God demonstrated mercy to Nineveh - Jonah 4:1-4
 - a. Jonah had prophesied that God would destroy Nineveh in 40 days
 - b. God, after Nineveh "believed God" and repented, would no longer bring the judgement on them
 - c. This frustrated Jonah who, in his prayer to God, knew of God's graciousness and mercy
 - d. He did not want to be looked upon as a false prophet (it is commonly believed) - his own reputation (perspective) was more important to him than the demonstration of God's mercy
 - e. It could be also that he, in retrospect, wondered why God was forceful with him and gracious to Nineveh (as he had in his thoughts when he fled from God that God was gracious, merciful and slow to anger)
 - f. Before we point the finger, we should realize that it is our nature to resent God when He does not demonstrating mercy as we think it should be demonstrated - there are many who cannot accept that God will demonstrate His mercy to whomever He chooses and not in any way, under the supervision (or even the intimidation) of our scrutiny of its display
 - g. "He who, in denouncing the word of God against sinners, joins his own passions with the Divine threatenings, is a cruel and bad man, and should not be an overseer in God's house."
6. So, why does God show mercy?
 - a. "It is not the wretchedness of the creature which causes Him to show mercy, for God is not influenced by things outside of Himself as we are. If God were influenced by the abject misery of leprous sinners, He would cleanse and save all of them. But He does not. Why? Simply because it is not His pleasure and purpose so to do. Still less is it the merits of the creature which causes Him to bestow mercies upon them, for it is a contradiction in terms to speak of meriting "mercy." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5)—the one standing in direct antithesis from the other. Nor is it the merits of Christ which moves God to bestow mercies on His elect: that would be putting the effect for the cause. It is "through" or because of the tender mercy of our God that Christ was sent here to His people (Luke 1:78). The merits of Christ make it possible for God to righteously bestow spiritual mercies on His elect, justice having been fully satisfied by the Surety! No, mercy arises solely from God's imperial pleasure" Pink
 - b. The simple answer is that He knows what is perfect and because He desires to do so
 - c. Those who utilize the idea of God being obligated to show us mercy misunderstand the fundamental meaning of mercy - it cannot be deserved to genuinely be mercy
 - d. Man, in his innate pride does not desire to plead for genuine mercy - even when he does (in his natural state) it is out of frustration and even bitterness having been brought to an end reluctantly - those (under the influence of God's working) recognize their genuine need for mercy and readily admit it and make no attempt to make their case for deservedness - as in the difference between the pharisee and the tax collector - Luke 18:9-14
 - e. Error creeps in as we allow ourselves to start with the thinking that if He shows mercy to some He must show mercy to all - we obligating God with our limited frame of reference and self-confidence

The same demonstration of—
faith as seen in Abraham -
Rom. 4:3

Advertisers and market-
ers realize that people
are interested in what
"experts" desire - if an
expert wants it then
they must also - So, If
God desires something,
realizing His frame of
reference, we desire it
also whether it be mercy
or justice

7. What if we mishandle this attribute of God?

- a. As just mentioned, this concept is distorted when it is presumed that it must be applied to all, equally - this makes God obligated based upon our perspective - it also contradicts the core idea of mercy - if it must be applied to all, equally, then it is not mercy but a type of debt
- b. Some will categorize God's mercy as being above His holiness (righteousness) and will entertain thoughts that there cannot be eternal judgement as this does not fit the idea of God's mercy (at least in their eyes) - they fail to see that God's redemptive plan dealt with the holy demands of His righteousness (though not all are under this) - ideas of purgatory and that the condemned are totally annihilated (Jehovah's Witnesses) are conjured up to deal with this man-made perception of this attribute of God
- c. Some, understand correctly the concept of God's mercy but refuse to accept it at work in their lives practically - it is seen in the failure to accept the forgiveness of God which is directly tied to this attribute - they cannot accept the fact that their sin is gone before God and they are more enamored with and motivated by guilt than they are with God's mercy
 - These see God as unable to be pleased and become embittered
 - These will also be more prone to be unmerciful in their thinking toward others
- d. Some interpret God's mercy as an assurance (of some type) of a life of peace for us - if the thought is peace with God then it is true, though if it is a peaceful and comfortable existence on the earth, then it will disillusion them - as illustrated in Hebrews 12, God's mercy and grace is often seen in His chastening us in love - as His children
- e. Some allow themselves to be the "standard" as to when God's mercy should be demonstrated - to be God's mercy it must be His to mete out as He chooses - and knowing that He is omniscient and perfect, we can fully trust His application of His mercy

8. As mentioned briefly, one of the key "outputs" of God's mercy is forgiveness of sins

- a. In the height of grief and discouragement, Jeremiah realized the greatness of God's mercy being his fulfillment in light of what he truly deserves - Lam. 3:21-24
- b. It is because of His mercies that we are not "consumed" - His "compassions" do not fail
- c. His daily demonstration of mercy to us is a daily reminder of the greatness of His faithfulness
- d. His forgiveness (literally a "letting go" of the offense) is an outworking of God's mercy (God not holding against us what we deserve to have against us) and His grace (God giving us what we do not deserve to have)

E. The Grace of God - I Cor. 15:10; I Pet. 5:10

God shows mercy because He is merciful and gives grace because He is gracious

1. It may be debated as to whether or not this is an attribute of God or a "product" of His gracious attributes (goodness, love, mercy) - does God show grace because He loves or has mercy or because He is gracious in who He is? We will deal with this as an attribute either way
 - a. There are two key words that are translated as "grace" and both have the general idea of favor
 - b. So, the truest defining of God's grace will not be seen as much in the lexical definition as much as its application and objects
 - c. When we study the objects of God's grace we begin to see all that it entails
2. The first usage of the term for "grace" is in Gen. 6 in reference to Noah - Gen. 6:8
 - a. The most obvious "motivation" for His grace would seem to be in light of the uprightness of Noah (especially in a wicked generation)
 - b. God's favor is always towards the demonstrations of His attributes at work in us
 - c. Noah found favor with God because Noah was a "just" man (Gen. 6:9) but Noah was a just man because of God's grace (favor) at work in him
- Matthew Henry — d. "As the effect of God's favour to him. It was God's good-will to him that produced this good work in him. He was a very good man, but he was no better than the grace of God made him.."
3. God's grace makes us what we are - I Cor. 15:10
 - a. God not only spared us (by His loving mercy), He also has made of us something of genuine worth (value) by His grace
 - b. He could have just saved us, but because of His graciousness (voluntary favor on the undeserving) He has made us useful, effective and pleasing in His sight - His mercy spares, His grace produces!

- c. "The repetition implies the prominence which God's grace had in his mind, as the sole cause of his marvellous conversion and subsequent labors. Though "not meet to be called an apostle," grace has given him, in Christ, the meetness needed for the office." JFB
 - d. In verse 9 he openly declared, that among the apostles, he was the "least" - he had persecuted the church and did not have the "advantages" of the other apostles - but he was doing what he was doing, not because of credentials, merit or "native desire" but solely by the grace of God making him what he was and the "cause" of his extensive labors"
 - e. Then, in verse 11, the result of this realization comes out; whether it was Paul or the other apostles, the Gospel was preached and the Corinthians believed - the focus is on God's grace at work and not on the significance of the conduit of the grace!
4. So, grace is God showing favor by enabling and allowing participation in His work
- a. It is God's sharing (endowing) of His goodness, power and attention
 - b. It is that aspect of God that utilizes that which would normally not be even acknowledged as usable (or would normally be discarded) - It is God making something of nothing!
 - c. Grace is God's giving joy to those who deserve grief
 - d. At its most basic idea, grace is God's generosity - it is not required. else it would not be grace
 - e. Strong's Greek Dictionary adds, "... the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life"
 - f. There were many who changed the concept of God's mercy into something that could be earned and even, to some degree, stockpiled - the use of terms such as "sacrament" carry varying ideas; one of the key definitions for this term is "A rite believed to be a means or a visible form of grace." - there is no "means to grace" with out it being given by God, though the idea of there being symbolic concepts of God's grace can be possible (but these symbolisms or practices do not earn more grace)
 - g. Grace flows from who God is not from what we can do or by who/what we are
5. Two applications of God's grace (favor) on man
- a. The first is typically called "general grace" or "common grace" though the term is not used in the Scripture - it is used to describe God being gracious to all that are alive on the earth (His kindness regardless of their good or evil)
 - b. The most popular verse used to support this idea is Mt. 5:45 - the context of this verse is the emphasis for us to imitate our "Father" Who is gracious to both "good" and to "evil" by sending rain to both and having the sun to rise for both - actually, though, there is really no one "good" before God and compared to His holiness
 - c. It could be argued that this is not truly "grace" but a demonstration of God's patience, though it is clearly a demonstration of kindness (which may appear to be a type of favor) on the undeserving - It is not to be mixed up with or equated with efficacious, saving grace
 - d. Saving grace is God's favor bestowed in such a way that it is completely applied to us (judicially, legally, positionally) to make us perfect before God under and through the work of Christ - and when this grace is applied is without loss - it achieves its intended purpose always
 - e. Passages such as Eph. 2:1-10 demonstrate this concept of grace and passages such as Rom. 5:20 show it's power in comparison to the strongest enemy (sin) we know in the universe
 - f. This efficacious grace is not finished at our "salvation" but acts as our enablement to do the work that God gives us to do every day (as seen in passages such as Rom. 12:3,6 dealing with the gifts of God that enable us to do His work as well as II Cor. 9:8)
6. So, what are the repercussions that result from a misunderstanding of this characteristic if God?
- a. As with love and mercy, if grace is seen as being deserved or merited in any way, it not only cheapens the entire idea, but contradicts it - Rom. 11:6
 - b. If His favor is seen as license to sin, it defiles what is sacred and is presumptuous - this is the concept that Jude dealt with in Jude 1:4 and Paul warned against in Romans 6 - we were saved from something (sin/death) to something (life) and for something (righteousness)
 - c. Some know that God's grace is undeserved but they become proud when God gives them the grace to do what needs to be done (gifts, talents, opportunities) - God's grace is given to glorify His grace not our apparent abilities or unique opportunities - Eph. 1:6
7. The application of God's grace in our salvation will be dealt with in greater detail when dealing with Soteriology (the study of God's saving work)

It is a common misconception that one can do something to earn more grace - we can oppose it (to some degree) but we cannot generate or cause it

F. All that can be defined as “moral” must find their basis in God’s moral attributes

1. Morality is not a randomly defined quality or category nor does it find its authority in subjective interpretation and definition - it is an absolute concept that we are “morally” obligated to search out
2. Many come to believe that morality is relative and then struggle to discover or define a solid standard to base it upon - this is an exercise in futility since it places (ultimately) its source in the reasonings, deductions or opinions of man
3. When theology is not studied or it is belittled, then qualities such as goodness, love, mercy and grace are misinterpreted, misapplied or misused altogether
4. So we spend time and effort in the pursuit of not only learning more of God (our creator and the creator of all things) but we also do it to best know how to live our lives and to find the core of our purpose and the purpose for why we do what we do
 - Much of daily activity finds little purpose and significance and lacks authority behind it which, over years of practice, leads to discouragement, depression and despair in a life without meaning and activity without authority and significance
5. “He hath shewn thee, O man, what is good: and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Darby) - Micah 6:8
 - a. God had shown Israel the good to come and what is good in general and, therefore, left for them a clear understanding of their responsibilities
 - b. Their lives were to be characterized by the pursuit of living justly, having their hearts affectionate and passionate towards what is truly good (as God sets it to be) and to keep a humble perspective (self-concept) before God Who defines all these things by His existence and who He is
6. Sometimes, living by these revealed truths of who God is will appear to be naive or overly simplistic in the eyes of those around us but better to be those living by set principles firmly founded in who God is than to make brilliant deductions and life calculations based upon available “facts” currently present
 - Many throughout history have been very wise in the use of current information that seems to contradict God’s attributes and then have been proven to be in error when more information or other perspectives become available - we need these absolutes of God’s attributes to guide us through foggy times in life when the right and wrong or the best and acceptable paths before us seem unclear
7. The study of these overall attributes leads us to an automatic consideration of His greatness - if I am not enamored with these qualities of God, I need to rehearse them again in my thinking and seek to set my comparisons correctly in comparison to all else this world and age have to offer!

IV. The Greatness of God - Isaiah 40-48

- A. This passage is, without doubt, one of the most significant passages in all of Scripture in declaring, illustrating and confirming the greatness of God (compared to this world and other “gods”)
 1. Sometimes we are gripped by a concept as simple as a temporary worry or a fleeting blaze of glory and allow our focus to drift to that which does not merit our life focus
 2. Israel was an ongoing example of this and God taking from them the objects of their misdirected focus enabling them to see the futility of placing their confidence and purpose on that which can be taken or can change
 3. The predecessor to this passage is the warning of coming enslavement to Babylon and then God’s ultimate deliverance (from a greater enemy than Babylon or Rome) - the basis of their hope (comfort) would be in the knowledge that “The mouth of the LORD has spoken it”
- B. The greatness of God seen in His assured promise of deliverance - 40:1-5
 1. Comfort is to be given to His people with the awareness of His gracious promises
 2. Warfare will come to an end and iniquity will be removed (the demands satisfied)
 - a. It is stated that Israel would receive “double for all her sins” which could be in reference to the captivity to Babylon and Assyria or in reference that they received a removal of their sin in double (more than enough)
 - b. It would seem odd that, in light of the coming versus, that it would indicate that Israel would have “paid” for their own iniquities since this would come through Christ

3. Comfort is found in reliance upon the promises of God and the greatness of their fulfillment
 - a. As with Israel, our lives are to be lived in anticipation of His coming
 - b. The preparation for the coming of a great dignitary is pictured in these verses - all obstacles and areas that could be shameful are removed in preparation for the assured arrival - it becomes a central point of focus in their lives
 - c. This was in reference also to John the Baptist preparing the way for Christ - Luke 3:4
 - d. The glory (abundance) of God will be revealed to "all flesh" - though His greatness is not acknowledged by all it will assuredly happen! Why? "For the mouth of the LORD has spoken" - this is definitive - when the Omnipotent One says it will happen, there is no doubt it will - to doubt Him is to be looked upon as absurd in light of His greatness!

C. The seeming greatness of man is fleeting and not comparable to God's greatness - 40:6-8

JFB — 1. "The connection is, "All human things, however goodly, are transitory: God's promises alone steadfast"

2. The "glory" of man fades like the grass and a flower in a field - it may have a time where it stands out among us (as other grasses and flowers) but it will not last and its splendor is insignificant in comparison to that of God's
 - a. In verse 7, the Geneva Bible Notes clarifies, "The spirit of God will discover the vanity in all that seems to have any excellency of themselves."
 - b. Even the glory that is to be had is from and dependent on God's Spirit - He will reveal all for what it really is in and of itself!
 - c. While the glories of mankind grow and then fade, the word of God will continue and grow in significance forever (literally into the vanishing point - no end can be seen or anticipated)
 - d. So, one of the key aspects to the greatness of God is the eternity of His promises and word
 - e. One of the deficiencies with the "glories" of man is their temporality and fluctuation - they can not be counted on to last - once seeming greatness is achieved, a replacement is coming!
 - f. In light of this, our pursuit of greatness should be pursued outside of ourselves in focused upon and established in the greatness of God - see Psa. 115:1; Isa. 48:11

D. God's greatness in comparison to other objects of greatness - 40:12

1. This verse are in response to the description of God to Judah in verses 9-11
 - a. Verse 10, "Look, the sovereign Lord comes as a victorious warrior; his military power establishes his rule. Look, his reward is with him; his prize goes before him." NET Bible
 - b. He comes as a conqueror and victor over all possible opponents
 - c. To His people, He is as a shepherd carrying them and caring for them
2. Who is this conqueror of opposition and shepherd of His people?
3. He measured out the waters of the earth as if in the palm of His hand
 - Not only does this carry the idea of all the waters fitting into His hand, but that He precisely measured them out to the perfect amounts - the amount of water that would be needed for the earth was determined
4. The universe (the heavens) were measured out by the span of His hand - As wide and deep as it needed to be was set and, if a comparison is to be made, it is no wider than the span of His hand
 - This would include all the stars and galaxies making the earth as if a speck of dust before Him
5. Then, from the great in size to the minute, He reveals the perception of God to the particle level - He measured out the soil/ground of the Earth in "the third part of a larger measure"
 - It is speculated that this pictures two fingers and the thumb measuring out the dust of the earth
6. The mountains, great intimidating formations to us are as objects that God moved around, weighed them precisely for their place on the earth, and set them
 - This carries more with it than just His moving mountains. It demonstrates His creative power and creative wisdom in His placement of the mountains - "This may refer to the work of creation, when the heavens were stretched out as exactly as that which is spanned, and the earth and waters were put together in just proportions, as if they had been measured, and the mountains made of such a weight as to serve for ballast to the globe, and no more. Or it may refer to the work of providence (which is a continued creation) and the consistency of all the creatures with each other." Matthew Henry
7. His size is measureless, His reach unlimited, and His powerful precision perfect!

The endurance of God's greatness is in direct contrast to the fleeting hints of greatness in the aspirations and accomplishments of man

E. The greatness of God's knowledge/understanding - 40:13-14

1. Seeing that God can measure the universe in a span of His hand, who can measure Him?
 - a. Who can measure His "spirit"? - His essence or His mind
 - b. Who can even begin to comprehend God? - How is it that anyone could entertain the thought that they could "figure" God out and could in any way offer advice?
 - c. His greatness is called into question, not necessarily by our words as much as by our actions and attitudes (usually in responses to circumstances we do not like/agree with)
 - d. This question could also be taken to mean, "who has directed" the Lord? - who, in light of His greatness, dares to tell Him what to do?
2. Who is it that gives Him advice?
 - a. Clearly, this is rhetorical, but again, our attitudes often communicate the idea that God should seek our advice
 - b. Realizing that His understanding is infinite (limitless) (Psa. 147:5), we should never allow our thinking to take the posture that God is misinformed or unclear of any circumstance that we face or could ever face
 - Literally, His intelligence cannot be calculated - His frame of reference is not seeing everything, but knowing/understanding what it is, why it is and what it will be
 - c. The question in verse 13 is literally asking, "who was His person of advice that taught Him?"
 - How did God come to know what He knows? - Being omniscient, He has always known what there is to know and only He knows what that is!
 - d. Who gave God insight, or taught Him what is right and what is wrong (judgement/justice), and informed Him of knowledge that He did not know, and showed Him the road to reasoning (how to think things through correctly and draw the correct conclusion)?
 - e. Paul used part of this in Rom. 11:33-36 and A.T. Robertson said of this, "... now he pauses on the edge of the precipice as he contemplates God's wisdom and knowledge, fully conscious of his inability to sound the bottom with the plummet of human reason and words."

We are clearly in great error when we entertain any type of thinking that God does not know something or has been wrong in His sovereign control. It is possible that many question His sovereign control, not so much because they doubt God but because they trust their own perception too highly

F. The greatness of God in comparison to the greatest of this world - 40:15-17

1. There is a progression of comparison with the nations of this world and illustrations which grow progressively smaller (almost sarcastically dealing with such and absurd comparison)
 - a. The nations of the earth (all put together) as if one super power, before God would, at the very best, equate to a drop in/on a bucket - in comparison to what could be there and the bucket itself, the drop is of no consequence
 - b. These nations, in comparison to the greatness of God, are as a speck of powder on a scale (balance) - it does not alter or influence the process of measuring - the "business" at hand progresses by the One conducting it with no regard to the dust - so is the combined power and will of the nations before the plan and purposes of God at work!
 - c. Still smaller, before God, the "islands" (maybe better the continents) on which these nations are built are like "fine dust" (even smaller particles of dust) - in this illustration, He can lift them up as a person would pick up a pinch of dirt (a few grains of sand) in their fingers and scatter them
 - d. Still smaller, these combined nations are as "nothing" before Him (in His presence) if a comparison were to be attempted
 - e. But, if we were to be as clear as we can possibly attempt to comprehend, if all the power, wealth, influence and all other combined might were to be presented as a comparison before the greatness of God, they would be "less than nothing" or "less than empty" - maybe like a type of "black hole" which can only have what it draws in because it has nothing of itself
 - There is no language that can be concocted or true illustration to demonstrate the nothingness of the nations flaunting all they have before God!
2. If the nations would theoretically decide to make a burnt offering that would be appropriate before God's greatness, even if they could take all the mightiest trees in Lebanon and the seeming countless animals that lived within these massive woods, it would not begin to be an appropriate gesture
 - a. And yet mankind is constantly priding itself in its inventive ideas of its own ideas of sacrifices that would please God
 - b. Though, the greatest that all the combined nations could sacrifice before God would not begin to be worthy of His greatness

G. God's greatness cannot be "boxed-in" - 40:18-26

1. Understanding God's true greatness wards off all forms of idolatry - there are 6 basic concepts of "idols" throughout the scripture - each needs to be countered with the reality of God's greatness

- a. There are idols of unrighteous fears - as the word used in I Kings 15:13
 - (1). The word used here and in other places means "a terror" and the root idea being that which causes someone to tremble (Hebrew word - *miphletseth*)
 - (2). That which is feared more than God is an idol - seeing that God is almighty, then when we place our fears/awe/reverence elsewhere, we communicate that whatever we fear more has greater strength and power than God - we "liken" it to God
- b. Idols are what are constructed to "resemble" God - These are any attempts (as stated in Isa. 40:18) to concoct an image or concept that is supposed to be God - II Chron. 33:7
 - (1). The word used here and in other places means "to resemble" or a "likeness" (Hebrew word - *semel*)
 - (2). This would be what the second commandment deals with in the term "graven image"
 - (3). This would be anything that takes the place of God in our lives, focus and faith
 - (4). It may be that which we believe closely resembles God - it is literally a god of our own making - a god that fits my idea and understanding of what and who God should be
- c. Idols were the outworking of self-effort - as in the word used in Isa. 48:5 which has as one of its basic idea, pain, toil and struggle (Hebrew word - *otseb*)
 - (1). Idols were that which demanded effort to be appeased which carried with it not only the idea of struggling to serve but that the "god" could be appeased by self-effort
 - (2). Our own strength and abilities can become idols! Our own thinking, opinions and perspectives can be idolatry in that we liken God to what is not correct
- d. Idols were literally that which were of no value and ability (in this passage they were called "dumb" (speechless)) - idolatry would include misplaced trust - as illustrated in Hab. 2:18-20 (Hebrew word - *eliyl*)
 - (1). Idolatry is placing your confidence in something that does not rightly deserve it and because of it, not placing it in God
 - (2). Our worship is practiced in our dependence - what will we "liken" to God by placing our trust and confidence on apart from God? - as this passage demonstrates along with Isa. 40:18, it should seem ridiculous to us
- e. Idols were that which God hates - This is another use of the words and concept of idolatry which was often translated "abomination" in the old English
 - (1). The "worship" of an idol was not only focusing on the idol itself, but idolatry involved the affection for and the practice of that which God hates
 - (2). It is the greatest of "abominations" to liken God to that which He hates and that which is His opposite
 - (3). When God asks, "To whom/what will you liken God?" it is clearly a rhetorical question - It carries with it, in context, an air of sarcasm
- f. One of the worst kind of idols is the idol of "excuse" - this comes from illustrations such as Israel at Sinai
 - (1). The making of a permissive God or a God that (conveniently) demands that you do what you wanted to do all along - in the case of Israel, their new God wanted them to be immoral and to go along with their natural impulses
 - (2). In Exodus 32, the Israelites made a golden calf to serve as a visible image of God and then went on to "play" (Ex. 32:6)
 - (3). An "excuse" is in a very strong sense an idol in that it makes permissive what is forbidden (an is usually based upon what one considers "sounds reasoning")

Looking to my job/strength/ability for provision (I earn it) or looking to government /family /friends (I deserve it)

God is "likened" to human reasoning and craftiness when the reasonings leads to a conclusion in opposition to God

2. The question deals with what we would look to imagine/create to be "as God" or anything or concept we would know of or search out that we would "compare" to Him
3. Verses 19-20 deals with those that try to actually do this - the point is to demonstrate the foolishness of this and it seems to demonstrate that this was a normal part of society (at least among the pagans) - the wealthy had a method and even those that were poor had their way of forging a god-image

- a. It is interesting that they seek to have a “god” that will not rot and decay and one that will not “totter,” be removed or topple
- b. Does it not seem foolish to follow or worship a god that must be propped up from time to time (literally and figuratively)? This is the same for those that worship and follow a conceptual or philosophical god - even the “gods” of the nations demand to be defended by their people while our God needs no defense and will avenge Himself!
4. The greatness of God revealed in fundamental rhetorical questions and definitive answers - vs. 21-24
 - a. The initial purpose is to promote the idea that the questions to be asked are blatantly obvious
 - One would have to actively pursue ignorance to miss them! - as described in Romans 1:18, these are they that seek to “hold down the truth in unrighteousness”
 - b. “You don’t know?” - Pointing to one’s inner thoughts - “You really have no concept of the real God, the God of the universe?”
 - Anyone can outwardly deny the God of the Bible, but it does not mean that they can avoid or get away from their own thoughts. As also detailed in Romans 1, they know that He exists because God has shown them” - Rom. 1:19
 - c. “Have you not heard?” - You’ve actually been living in a place that you have never heard of this? - Psalm 19 demonstrates the “general revelation” of God to all mankind and describes it as “There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard..”
 - d. “Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?” - in one sense, haven’t you learned from history, past wisdom and accounts that have been handed down since the founding of the earth?
 - e. Do you not know of the One that “reduces the rulers of the earth to nothing?”
 - f. He is the one that “sits above the circle of the earth” - as one that sits as judge and controller over the earth - He is not pictured as one in labor and at work, but in observation, judging and controlling all that happens - He is the sovereign Lord of the earth
 - (1). The term “sits” is also a term used to indicate “dwells” - He is not a fleeting God
 - (2). “Believing astronomers have marvelled that long before astronomy discovered that the world was round Isaiah penned this. Seven hundred years before Christ, he wrote as though this were common knowledge” Bultema
 - g. “The inhabitants are like grasshoppers” - a common comparison to indicate a smallness of size before another of far greater size (as the Israeli spies in Canaan compared themselves to the inhabitants of the land - Num. 13:33)
 - h. He is the one who stretches out the “heavens” as one would set up a tent - picturing not just the sky of the earth but the universe as being a dwelling place for the earth and its inhabitants - This is the One that with a simple (as it were) stretching out of His fingers, the elements of the universe and thinly spread it out to make the entire creation
 - The comparison to a “tent” is interesting not only that it indicates a dwelling but one that is not necessarily designed to be permanent
 - i. Yes, this is the One that makes (sets, appoints, determines) when those that are “honorable” on this earth are brought to nothing (as in Psalm 75)
 - (1). As we learn in Romans 13, all earthly positions are of God, and all the appointments to these positions are in His hands as well
 - (2). Though they boast great power and influence and even oppose the God that placed them there, they have no power of themselves (it does us no good to live in the dread of their seeming potential power) - they can do nothing out from under God’s jurisdiction - even Satan must come to God for “permission” - Job 1:6-12
 - (3). Not only does He demote them, but reduces them to nothing - their power and influence (and even memories of them) are gone
 - j. He “makes the judges of the earth meaningless”
 - (1). These are those with the power to pronounce sentence (just or unjust)
 - (2). These have the power over lives and governments (power over other powers)
 - (3). These great “judges” of the earth are brought to “waste”, “desolation” and ruin - the great reasonings of their decisions, their accomplishments are brought to meaningless
 - k. These seeming great authorities of the ages are compared to little plants that are not permitted to take root (they are not designed to be around a long time) - they are not “what it is about”

It is He that protects the earth from all the potential threats in the universe that could destroy it (“curtain”)

Many of the greatest powerful people this world has ever known are no longer even known - many others that are known are, at best, vague memories and accounts

It is interesting to note, in the illustration of the “plants” that they do not bear fruit - they will not continue on (they or ultimately, their lineage)

- (1). He “blows” on them and they wither and this is followed by a “whirlwind” which blows them away like straw in the wind
- (2). These (rulers and powers) may appear to the “common man” to be above the possibility of harm - and yet God demonstrates His power over them
- (3). “..we are so wicked and ungrateful judges of the divine power, that we often imagine Calvin _____ God to be inferior to some feeble man. We are more terrified frequently by the empty mask of a single man than we are strengthened by all the promises of God.”

4. The greatness of God revealed in His control over the planets and stars - vs. 25-26

a. The “Holy One” asks a question (He who is “sacred”, “pure” and “perfect”)

- (1). Who is it that we would make equal with God? - remember who is asking the question
- (2). What person or being would we compare God to? - if we are guilty of this, we are This is one of the “we dare not ever try’s” — actually placing ourselves on equal plane with God in that we see ourselves as having the “authority” to determine His comparison and ultimately His “ranking”

b. Wait! Before you try, look up to the sky at night and ponder the stars and their controller

- (1). He is the creator of these innumerable majesties (and the more they are studied and observed, the more magnificent they are)
- hosts - abu - tsaba — (2). He is “Lord Sabaoth” (Rom. 9:29; James 5:4) - literally Lord of Hosts - He is over, in this case, the hosts of the heavens (all the stars as if in His army awaiting His orders)
- (3). He knows each by name (just as Adam named the animals over which he had dominion, so God knows the name of each star over which He has complete dominion) - and to know their name is to know each intimately (in complete detail)
- (4). Not one star (or “heavenly body”) is unnoticed or not utilized because His power is so great (He has great strength (limitless) and is powerful in the exercise of it - this illustration is more vivid now that we can observe some of the displays of power in space) - each, as one of His armies, responds to His instruction, performing their particular part

Some who study astronomy deduce that there is an interaction between the planets, stars and systems that maintain an overall balanced system

H. God’s greatness never tires and is the perfection of timing - 40:27-31

1. God asks another question directed at Israel - “Why do you say that I do not see your situation and will not see where justice is needed?” - vs. 27

- a. The reference to “Jacob” and then “Israel” brings attention to God as the covenant maker
 - He has not forgotten His promises.. why would they think He does not know what’s happening and why would they see their difficulties as proofs that God has not control?

b. Nothing escapes the notice of God! His greatness is seen and exercised in His omniscience

2. Truths that counter this speculation - vs. 28-31

- a. He again uses rhetorical questions - “Do you not know” (we might phrase is something like, “Do you really not know this? How could you have missed something so obvious?”)
- b. The first name used is “Everlasting God” - it is hard to argue against one who is eternal - seeing He has always been, how is it that He would be naive in any area? - in comparison to all else that is temporal and fleeting
- c. He is “the Lord” (Jehovah - the self -existent one”) - He has no “cause” and no beginning
- d. He is the “Creator of the ends of the earth” - every place one can go and one can be in the creation, God made it - we cannot be where He is not! - this is an extreme comfort and confidence when at a place where it seems we are at the “end of the earth”
- e. He does not become “weary” (tired, faint, fatigued) and exhausted in the exercise of His kindness and graciousness (as people, even the well intended, will grow weary)
- f. His understanding in “inscrutable” - His intelligence and comprehension of any circumstance cannot be measured, figured out and calculated - frustration ensues when the finite (us) rests their confidence on their comprehension and perception of the activity or perceived inactivity of God - do not seek to corner God into your imagination!
- g. Many times the Israelites slipped into discouragement and despair because they “leaned on their own understanding” and concluded the “end of the story” based upon what they saw, thought and felt at a particular time
- h. Don’t worry though as He gives strength to those fatigued - it is endurance and conquering God plans, not escape!

See Psalm 139:7-12

He who never tires gives enablement to those that do tire

The realization that we, by nature, wear down, is to lead us to God, not self-reliance or despair. Without God, though, the conclusion would be, "How is it possible to understand life when the entire world is ordered by a law such as the second principle of thermodynamics, which points to death and annihilation?" Leon Brillouin (French physicist)

See also II Chr. 32 for another example

Often, waiting is the most difficult "work" we can do - it involves faith and trust

- i. It is interesting to note that His strength (enablement) is described as being given to the "faint" and to those that are "not strong" - no doubt, we face weariness and weakness to keep us dependent (focused upon the greatness of God) versus independence (focused upon self-reliance)
- j. We are subject to "entropy" (the loss/disbursement of energy) while God is not - fatigue, tiredness, inability and weakness are not to lead us to despair or doubt of God, but to direct our focus to Him and His limitlessness (the source and maintainer of energy)
- k. So, even the seeming strongest and most energetic among us (youths) will grow weary, exhausted and will ultimately "stumble" (collapse) - all that is around us that would look to be dependable and (choicest) will falter and weaken sooner or later - In Ec. 9:11 it is clarified that reliance is not on these seemingly "obvious" sources of strength and predictability but upon the Lord. Matthew Henry stated on this verse, "A sovereign Providence breaks men's measures, and blasts their hopes, and teaches them that the way of man is not in himself, but subject to the divine will. We must use means, but not trust to them; if we succeed, we must give God the praise (Ps 44:3); if we be crossed, we must acquiesce in his will and take our lot."
- l. It is "vain" to trust "the arm of flesh" and even one's own heart - Jer. 17:5-10 - the truly "blessed" person is the one whose "hope" is the Lord
3. The solution to the "problem" and the conclusion to the realization of the greatness of God is for us to "wait on the LORD" - vs. 31
 - a. In contrast to all that was just spoken (all earthly strengths and reliances failing) those that "wait" upon the Lord are those whose strength is renewed (to those who return for more)
 - b. The key is in the term "wait" which entails several ideas..
 - (1). It carries, predominately, the idea of hope (a confidence which causes someone to rely on the object of hope completely) - the hope (expectation) is based in truth
 - (2). It carries the idea of dependence upon another - admission of inability - those that do not wait, act on their own and place their confidence in their own strength and ability
 - (3). It also contains the idea of looking to or for (one realizing the other is "in charge" of things and action waits till He acts) - it is dependent patience
 - (4). And, it also pictures a "banding together with" - to side with another or others
 - c. Those that are doing this (ongoing) will have their strength "recharged"
 - (1). It is ongoing in its supply of strength and is like the eagle that "mounts up its wings" and soars using the wind to go higher and continue
 - (2). As the eagle just spreads its wings and is carried along, so are we carried along as we rely upon the "wind" of God's grace and not our "flapping"
 - d. In light of all that was clarified of God's greatness our ultimate goal should be the access and utilization of His strength and an association with it and Him
 - (1). The opposite (self-reliance) ends in weakness, fatigue and ultimately despair
 - (2). Our aim is the habitual dependence upon His strength always being at the end our ours
 - e. When "running" (in situations requiring great exertion, we will never reach exhaustion (this is beyond our physical strength and deals more with the needed fortitude to not yield the "fight")
 - f. In the times of life that endurance is needed over long periods of time (walk) we will not grow "faint" (weary to the point we must stop pushing forward) - this is the strength that gets us through the monotony of everyday life
4. A defeated attitude stems from a focus that has drifted from the greatness of God to another "greatness" (either that of what we see as more magnificent or as more dreadful)
 - None must be competitive in our focus for bigness (omnipotence), impressiveness (glory), smartness (omniscience), empowerment (grace) and benevolence (love)

V. The Trinity of God

- A. The term "trinity" does not appear anywhere in Scripture but has been adopted to describe the "tri-unity" of God - In as basic a statement as can be used to summarize this characteristic or description of God it would be "three persons in one essence" - Mt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14; I Thes. 1:3-5; Eph. 4:4-6 (a few examples)
 1. The "three persons" of the Godhead would be the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
 2. The concept or reality of the trinity would not be known to us apart from the revelation of it from God - it is safe to assume that it is important for us to know

3. The last statement that begs questions that might be considered questionable in themselves - Why did God reveal this to us? What difference might it have made if we had not known this? Is it essential that we learn and come to know about the conclusions of the trinity?

- a. It is essential, to start with, that we identify that this is in the realm of speculation and the conclusions gleaned from these “speculations” be treated as such.. speculations!
- b. The first question, why did God reveal this to us can be answered simply and directly - because it is the what and who He is - it is the reality of Himself! - this may sound simplistic, but it is fundamental to the discussion when He describes, illustrates and demonstrates characteristics of Himself

Realizing that the doctrine of the trinity has been attacked throughout history, it should rouse our curiosity as to why it is deemed worthy of attack by its opponents

- It must be stressed, though, that “anthropomorphic” terms and concepts are used to communicate infinite concepts to finite understanding - so terms such as “Father” and “Son” are used to best communicate the aspects of the three-in-one relationship
- c. This can then be followed by other “speculations” regarding this question that demonstrate the logic and reasoning behind such a revelation

Loneliness would have demonstrated an imperfection and “need” in God. God needs nothing, so He could not have been lonely

“The nature of God must present mysteries to the finite mind, and the triune mode of existence is perhaps the supreme mystery.” Chafer

Luke 22:42; Php. 2:5-11; John 16:13

“God is the only intelligent Being, for Whom no mystery exists. To be surprised, to be indignant at encountering mysteries, is to be surprised, is to be indignant at not being God.” M. Coquerel

The realization of a coequal, triune God has a direct impact not just on “world view” but on our view of our purpose in general

- (1). The revelation of the triunity of God demonstrates the supreme relationship and that there has always been a relationship in the Godhead (how could such attributes as love, glory and so on have existed without an “object” of these affections and communication?) God was never lonely so fellowship was not the purpose for the creation of man and the universe
- (2). The differing “persons” or “modes” of the Godhead also demonstrate/illustrate that God does what He commands us to do. This is seen in the “roles” of each person of the Godhead - The Father decrees, wills, rules and has absolute control while the Son submits and fulfills the will of the Father perfectly. The Spirit speaks not of Himself but of Christ and enables the believers (as comforter) to perform their obligations
 - (a). The realization of the trinity illustrates to us the concept of willful subordination - Christ is equal with the Father in all ways and yet He submits to do the will of the Father and the Holy Spirit Who is equal with the Father and the Spirit comes, not to speak of Himself but of the Son - clearly, if this type of order, submission and obedience is observed in the coequal Godhead, how could we see that God’s will will be performed (in any way) with the exaltation of self (this places significance on the sin of pride, or sin being selfishness)
 - (b). It demonstrates that even though there is equality in essence, subordination in the fulfilling of a “plan” and in the maintaining of the perfect relationship “structure” is ideal (seeing that God does and is this and does not have to)
- (3). It may seem unnecessary to point out, but the revelation of God as three in one also demonstrates that God is far above our highest comprehension - no other concept of a god that man has devised has attempted to mimic this as it would not fit their imagination (man will always construct a god that fits into his thinking)
- (4). It is necessary for us to realize that God is fully in all that He does and is doing - for instance, this was essential to realize that Christ was fully God when He fulfilled the work of redemption - Acts 20:28; II Cor. 5:19
 - Those that see life as being “about” us refuse to see God being the doer of all His own will - they desire to see a created one sharing in the credit
- (5). It is also necessary to bring the proper honor to Christ and the Holy Spirit - when either is relegated to being less than God the Father in any way, they are dishonored
- d. It is also interesting to note that God does not dedicate a portion of Scripture to describe, detail and explain the trinity. It is assumed and discussed without direct explanation
 - (1). If the concept of the trinity is not scriptural, then there are numerous passages that do not make sense and exegetical acrobats must be performed to explain them away from what they “appear” to be clearly stating or implying
 - (2). Those that subscribe to another view most often do so to avoid a normal handling of passages that they cannot harmonize in their thinking. This breaks a fundamental rule in hermeneutics in that it places personal understanding and perspective above what is exegeted from the Scripture

B. General definitions, examples, and inferences of the Trinity

1. One indivisible essence or substance of three particular persons - it is essential to realize and agree to the singular essence of "God" as any other concept leads to polytheism (multiple gods)
 - a. This reality of the Lord being one Lord was stressed to Israel in countering the gods of the nations being many (many to each nation) - Deut. 6:4; Mr. 12:29
 - b. These other "gods" would often take on (or be characterized) as having physical or limited (in some way or another) substance
 - c. The concept of the trinity is very important to realize as, once accepted and understood (as revealed), we then understand that each person of the Godhead has the same, unlimited substance - this may not seem as important until we begin to also see that each person of the Godhead is revealed in greater clarity as to their part in the redemptive plan
 - d. In their substance they are one, one in existence, one in purpose, one in power
 - e. The first idea of this singular plurality is seen in Gen. 1:26 where God speak to Himself in the plural ("us" and "our") when about to create man in His image - this could not have been His speaking to the angels as we are not made in their image

This "image" is renewed (made to be) in Christ who Himself is the "image of the invisible God" - Col. 1:15

- In reference to the "image" of God there has been much debate as to what is referenced, though Paul is used to shed light on this in Eph. 4:24 and in Col. 3:10 clarifying that the image of God is more in reference to His righteousness and holiness (and it would be an interesting study to compare this idea with the creation of the angelic beings)

- f. This one essence is made up of three "persons" - this is where it gets more complicated!

"Truth existed before any revelation in written form was made. It therefore does not depend on revelation for its truthfulness. To the same end, it may be said that some truths, though recorded and in no way opposed to reason, are not demonstrable by reason. If, as has been proved, revelation is infinitely true, it follows that, should reason advance a contradiction to revelation, reason is at fault. The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most unequivocal teachings of the Bible. Though reason has no occasion to aid revelation in regard to this doctrine, revelation may assist reason." Chafer

- (1). This denotes more a "mode of the essence" than it does an attribute of the essence
- (2). "There are three forms of God. The whole divine essence subsisting in the paternal form is the first person, in the filial form is the second person, in the spirated or spirit form is the third person. The one undivided essence subsists in these three forms simultaneously and eternally and has no existence other than this trinal one. One of these original and eternal forms of God, namely, the Son, took 'a form of a servant,' still retaining his original divine form; and this form of a servant was 'a likeness of men'; and this likeness of men involved a 'fashion' or bodily form of a man. According to this representation of the apostle, a trinitarian person is an invisible form or mode of divine essence. It is not a material and bodily form, because it required to be incarnated in order to this. The Son of God while subsisting only as a particular eternal form of divine essence was as incorporeal and invisible as the other forms - the Father and the Spirit." - Shedd
- (3). This "mode of essence," though, must not be confused with our modes (such as man, father, employee, citizen) - each person of the Godhead is distinct from the other as seen in their "acting" upon each other uniquely (the Father loving the Son, the Son sending the Spirit, the Spirit speaking of the other) - John 3:35, 14:26, 16:13

- g. One of the supreme examples of this is found in Php. 2:1-11 distinguishing the Son from the Father and yet identifying the Son as having the "form of God"

- (1). The purpose of the illustration was to set the example for our "attitude"
- (2). Christ, before the incarnation, existed in the very "form" (image, exactness) of God (the Father) seeing that He did not "regard equality with God as something to be grasped" seeing He already had it
- (2). This form was glorious and eternal, "But the antithesis is not between His being on an equality with God, and His emptying Himself; for He never emptied Himself of the fullness of His Godhead, or His "BEING on an equality with God"; but between His being "in the FORM (that is, the outward glorious self-manifestation) of God," and His "taking on Him the form of a servant," whereby He in a great measure emptied Himself of His precedent "form," or outward self-manifesting glory as God."
- (3). He (Christ) took on Himself (as distinguished from the Father) the "form (same word) of a servant being "made" in the likeness (similitude) of mankind (and the lowest form of mankind, that being as a slave)
- (4). He, as distinct from the Father, became obedient to the death of the cross for us

JFB

Christ came as a man to a lowly conquered people who were under the dominance of Rome (the world power of the time)

2. Old Testament examples of the plurality of the Godhead

- a. Gen. 1:1-2, 26-27 - the first mentioning God (as Creator) and the Spirit also participating
 - The plural pronoun used in verse 26 and then singular in verse 27
- b. Other passages such as Gen. 11:7 and Isa. 6:8 also use the plural pronoun
- c. Psalm 45:7; 110:1 both indicate conversation and interaction in the Godhead
- d. There is the frequent reference to the “Angel of the Lord”
 - (1). In Gen. 16:7-11 He is delivering a message from the Lord as well as promising, Himself to “Multiply her seed” (only the Lord could do this)
 - (2). in Gen. 22:9-14 He stops Abraham from slaying Isaac, then uses the pronoun “Me” when referring to Abraham not withholding his son from Him
 - (3). In Ex. 3:1-6 the Angel of the Lord is said to appear to Moses and then talks to him as the Lord and God
 - (4). In Num. 22:22-35 the Angel of the Lord deals with Balaam, allows Balaam to bow before him all the way to the ground, and then informs Balaam that he will say only what He instructs him to say
 - (5). In Judges 2:1-5 the the Angel of the Lord speaks to Israel and rebukes them for not obeying Him
 - (6). Judges 6:11-18, 22 He speaks with Gideon as the Angels of the Lord and then is described as being the Lord Himself speaking
 - (7). There are several other references to this “person/angel” Who is also the Lord
- e. Again, these can be considered (by some) to be intimations of the trinity, though these examples (and more) clearly demand an explanation

The Angel of the Lord is commonly believed to be Christ (with these appearances called “Theophanies” or “Christophanies”)

C. The deity of Christ clarified in detail in John 1

1. This “prologue” to John’s Gospel is essential to understand and “get right,” or else much of what will be described, illustrated and explained later will not be fully grasped or will be completely misunderstood - His being known as God is vital to the entire book
 - a. “The prologue of John is a literary masterpiece. Its balance is almost unparalleled. It is a carefully crafted work of art, a revelation that has inspired believers for almost two thousand years. The brightest minds have been fascinated by it and have always marvelled at its beauty. It is an inexhaustible treasure.” James White (“The Forgotten Trinity”)
 - b. The beginning of all things (and even the references to before the beginning) set the stage to lay out and demonstrate God’s redemptive plan from the start
 - (1). It demonstrates that God knew and planned for the fall of man
 - (2). It clarifies Christ as being before “the beginning”
 - (3). It also clarifies Christ’s (the Word) complete sovereignty over all things
2. One of the key phrases in this chapter is the first - “εν αρχη ην ο λογος..”
 - a. “In the beginning was the Word..” (the subject, time frame and the “being” verb)
 - b. The subject of what is about to be discussed is “the Word” - λογος
 - c. This was a common word for “word” but John is using it as a name - there is much speculation and reasoning regarding the use of this term for Christ though it seems mostly to be identifying Christ with being “the Word of God” in the sense of the venue of “getting things done” - such as with the creation when God “said” or passages such as Psalm 33:6, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made” - it could be said that Christ is the “doer,” or the worker of God’s will - He is more than the personification of God’s Word though this fits
 - d. The time frame is starting at the beginning (of creation, of time)
 - e. The verb, though seemingly small is pivotal! - “was” (ην)
 - (1). This verb is used in contrast to another verb (εγενετω) - “cause/came into being”
 - (2). The verb for “was” comes from the main “being verb” ειμι (I am or exist) and in this usage literally means “had already been being”
 - (3). Immediately, the Word is described as having already been being “existing” when the beginning of all things began - He is eternal
 - To say there was a time before “the beginning” are at the very best, speculating
 - (4). The core concept to realize is that no matter the time frame being discussed (even the beginning) He is already there

Those that push to have Christ come after the creation (or as part of it) allude to the idea that the redemptive plan was an afterthought, and God being a responder versus the initiator

John uses this verb in reference to “the Word” and the other verb “egeneto” in reference to all else

“Without the article, it can refer to any possible beginning” - Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament

- (5). Also note, that the absence of the article before “beginning” reminds us that He “was” before (already there) any beginning one might choose to consider
- (6). “If then, He was before all creation. and He *was*, for “*all* things were made *by him*,” if He was “in the beginning,” then He was Himself *without beginning*, which is the only negative way of saying He was eternal.” Pink

f. So, in the first phrase it is established that at the beginning of anything, Christ (the Word) already was (in existence) - He cannot be “predated” - there is no “before” Christ

3. Then we are given the “qualitative” phrase of the Word - “και ο λογος ην προς τον Θεον”

- a. “..and the Word was with God” - (the subject, being verb and the location)
- b. Still dealing with the subject (the Word) and still dealing with His being before any beginning
- c. He was “with” (toward or unto) God - this preposition carries with it a few distinct ideas

Even in English, the word “with” can mean, not only being along or near someone, but one with someone, as in the question, “Are you with us?”

- (1). He was, as it were, in the presence of God (as we would use “with”)
- (2). This is key in identifying His personality (or “person” of the Godhead) as being distinct from the Father - it could have said He was “in God” or “under God”, or as it clarifies here, He was one with God (as the next phrase will make absolute)
- (3). This is key also in that it speaks of His position with God with no mention of His being made/created or that there was ever a time (a beginning) where He was not “with God” (as one of the Godhead) - it could not say “and God was with God” seeing it is in reference to the essence of God and He is being clarified as distinct in the Godhead

(4). Again, προς is a preposition used to describe a relationship/standing, not just location

4. Then the most distinct phrase of Christ’s deity - “..και Θεος ην ο λογος”

Still using the verb εν (was), we know that at the beginning the Word already was, and the Word had already been being with God and now the Word had always been and always will be God

- a. “.. and the Word was God” - or it could, literally translated say, “and God was the Word” - though, as to be explained, this would confuse the intent of the phrase
- b. To properly handle this, we must identify the subject of this phrase, which in Greek is identified by the article - this makes “the Word” the subject and why it is placed first in our translations
- c. The predicate (which tells something of the subject) tells us that He is God - in this case it is the predicate nominative (a noun or pronoun which follows the verb and describes or renames the subject) - it does not require the article and actually, if it had the article (THE God) it would be making “the Word” interchangeable with “the God” which is not the intent (Christ is not all of the Godhead just as the Father and Spirit are not all of the Godhead) - how else could this be stated? - and there is no example of why John would be intending to describe the Word as “a god” seeing that he (John) always uses this word for God as in reference to the God
- d. “By exact and careful language John denied Sabellianism by not saying ho theos ên ho logos. That would mean that all of God was expressed in ho logos and the terms would be interchangeable, each having the article. The subject is made plain by the article (ho logos) and the predicate without it (theos) just as in Joh 4:24 pneuma ho theos can only mean “God is spirit,” not “spirit is God.” So in 1Jo 4:16 ho theos agapê estin can only mean “God is love,” not “love is God” as a so-called Christian scientist would confusedly say. For the article with the predicate see Robertson, Grammar, pp. 767f. So in Joh 1:14 ho Logos sarx egeneto, “the Word became flesh,” not “the flesh became Word.” Luther argues that here John disposes of Arianism also because the Logos was eternally God, fellowship of Father and Son, what Origen called the Eternal Generation of the Son (each necessary to the other). Thus in the Trinity we see personal fellowship on an equality.” RWP

What is Sabellianism? - It is also known as Modalism and teaches that God is one being, one person, who successively takes on three different forms or manifestations

- e. The core idea behind this wording is to indicate that what God was the Word was
- f. Our goal is to reach and confirm the intended meaning of John in the use of Θεος
- (1). He could not have meant, as discussed already, “a god” and there is no other example of this usage by John nor would it make any sense to the context
- (2). It could not have meant “the God” as clarified in Robertson’s explanation, it would make the terms God and Word interchangeable, which also was not the intent - the purpose is not to identify who God is as much as it is to clarify who the Word is!
- (3). Without the article, it is describing WHAT the Word is (qualitative)

Examples like this demonstrate the absurdity

g. It would be foolish to attempt to take the numerous other instances where the article does not appear before Θεός and say that it must be translated “a god”

(1). Such as II Cor. 5:19 - “.. a god was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself”

(2). Or, in the immediate context (John 1) verses 6, 12, 13 and 18

h. “It ignores a basic tenant of translation: if you are going to insist on a translation, you must be prepared to defend it in such a way as to provide a way for the author to have expressed the alternative translation. In other words, if Θεός ην ο λογος is “the Word was a god,” how could John have said “the Word was God?” If John had employed the article before Θεός, he would have made the terms Θεός and logos interchangeable, amounting to modalism.”

James White

5. “The same was in the beginning with God” - vs. 2

a. “this one was in the beginning with God;” Young’s Literal Translation

b. We might phrase it, “This one (the Word) was the same one Who WAS already there at the beginning of all things with (as one with) God”

c. This is given to add emphasis to His eternality - if Christ was created, this would have been the place to clarify that He was created before the beginning of the universe - instead, John stresses the presence of Christ with God at the beginning of all things

d. “He..assures us that that union was not one which was commenced in time, and which might be, therefore, a mere union of feeling, or a compact, like that between any other beings, but was one which existed in eternity, and which was therefore a union of nature or essence.”

Barnes

6. Now John adds the deistic works of Christ, for only God creates - vs.

a. “ALL things were made by Him..” - This is all inclusive - “Through Him all things became”

• See I Cor. 8:6 for the harmony of this between God and Christ

b. The positive statement lays out the creation of “all” (no article before it in the Greek)

c. And, lest there be any doubt, John precisely declares that not one thing was made without Him ——— • The first statement declares “παντας” were made to be (versus always having existed) and apart from Him (in the second statement), literally, “not was that which became”

d. This is all inclusive - in other words, Christ was not created seeing He created all things!

The “becoming” verb (used for creating (coming into being)) is now used of the “all things” and not of Christ

7. As God, all life (living or aliveness) is found in Him - vs. 4

a. “In Him was life..” - the same verb (it was, is and always will be) in Him

(1). He is the source of all life - not just human life, but all life - there are two Greek words for life, the first “bios” in reference to human life and then zoe (dz-oay) which is in reference to life in general (or living) - as in our terms “biography” and “zoology”

(2). This word for life is the second (zoe) - all life and living is of, from and through Him

(3). In creating all things, He made life (living) also and sustains all life and living - this is further confirmed and clarified in Heb. 1:3 as well as in Col. 1:15-20

b. “.. and the life was the light of men.”

(1). There is some debate as to the precise application of this phrase, though in light of the usage of the first phrase (that all life (“aliveness”) is from Him, then it is this life (aliveness and awareness) that is the light to men

(2). There is, in the life of creation in general, a general revelation of God that (as clarified in Romans 1) serves as enough revelation from God to leave all unbelieving mankind without excuse before God

(3). Though, clearly **as seen in Christ**, this light is more so the Light of the Gospel

• Life (living) as it really is, is only in Him - I John 5:11

(4). All true light (the ability to discern truth and see the “real” reality) is in and by Him

• Christ uses this same term in John 8:12 and 9:5 when speaking of His being the light of the world (versus the light of men)

8. As the Light, He “shines in the darkness” - vs. 5

a. The Light (again) is the life from and in Christ alone and the “darkness” is the obscurity deceit as the absolute result of sin - or that which is opposed to the “light of truth”

b. The darkness is unable to “comprehend” or “overtake” the light

(1). The first idea is clearly communicated in our translations - those in darkness are unable to comprehend this light - it is not understood and accordingly rejected

(2). The word “comprehend” also has the idea of overtaking

9. Christ is the source of all light, seeing He is the Light - vs. 9
 - a. Clear distinctions are made to clarify that, while coming into the world, Christ is and was the source of all “enlightenment” that there was to be had
 - b. He is the source of illuminating light which reveals the truth and He does not borrow this “light” from any other source - any “light” that mankind has is from Him
10. He came into His own creation and was found unapproved by it - vs. 10
 - a. “Taking the first two clauses as one statement, we try to apprehend it by thinking of the infant Christ conceived in the womb and born in the arms of His own creature, and of the Man Christ Jesus breathing His own air, treading His own ground, supported by substances to which He Himself gave being, and the Creator of the very men whom He came to save.” JFB
 - b. “He is the true light, the genuine and ultimate self-disclosure of God to man.” Linguistic Key
 - c. Christ is the light as referenced also in John 3:18-21 and He is rejected by those who are characterized by disbelief in Him because their “deeds are evil” and His light reveals them for what they are - this is a reminder of the motive behind those trying to either reject Christ altogether or to redefine and lessen who He is
 - d. Being in His own creation, the world did not even recognize Him - the world is in a constant state of blindness which can only be countered/corrected by Christ Himself
11. He came to His own land and people and was rejected - vs. 11
 - a. The literal idea is that He was not welcomed for who He was
 - b. This is the precise response He receives from the cults - He is acknowledged for being a good man or a prophet, but not for being God
 - c. The revelation of who Christ is is from the Father - Mt. 16:13-17
12. The sole authority of Christ over the right to be God’s children - vs. 12-13
 - a. In contrast to those who did not receive Him, those that did receive Him were given the right to be the children of God - this right only comes from Christ
 - b. This is evidenced by the “believing in His name” - trust on and in His name (His authority, power and work) and nothing else - the idea is to have trust that entrusts - as described in James 2, genuine belief/faith is always accompanied with action
 - c. It carries with it the same idea Paul described when clarifying that salvation is evidenced in those “invoking” the name of Christ - Rom. 10:13
 - d. This spiritual birth is not of the flesh (either by birth, position or any effort or connection of man), nor by the will of any person or persons but solely of God
 - This last phrase is key in identifying Christ with God - in verse 12 it is by the power given by Christ to be the sons of God, and then in verse 13 it, in perfect harmony, clarifies that all those “born” into God’s family are there by God - Christ and God are the authority!
13. The first time the word *ἐγένετο* is used of Christ is in verse 14 when speaking of His “becoming” flesh - the Word (which already was) became flesh
 - a. He was not always in a physical or fleshly form, but at this point in time He became so
 - b. John then elaborates that He lived among them (as in his first hand account) - this was also a point he described in I John 1:1-5 (and also warned against contradicting this point, that Christ came (became) in flesh - 4:2-3) - see also 2 Peter 1:16
 - c. While living among them, they were able to see His glory - it was a particular glory - the glory as of “the only begotten from the Father..”
 - The term “only begotten” does not refer as much to the “begetting” in His physical form as much as it does to His uniqueness - as the NIV translates it, “The One and Only”
 - d. This is the first reference to the Father, now making a contrast to the differing persons of the Godhead - Christ (the Word) as God, and now the Father as God (as being the “begetter” of the One and Only.. the Word)
 - e. This glory that evidenced His physical “tent” as being from the Father also evidenced Him being full of “grace and truth”
 - Christ was the epitome of grace (kindness, benevolence, enablement) and truth (without flaw an error) - this glory being more than brightness!

The term for “dwelt” has the idea of “tabernacling” among us - as our bodies are just “tents” utilized for a short time on this earth - the picture is of us being transitory

14. One more note regarding the term “only begotten”

Clearly, as the “God-man” He was completely unique from all that ever came or will over “become”

- a. Many misunderstand this term in the Greek because they assume the second part of the compound word comes from a term which is used to mean “give birth”
- b. The first part of μονογενής is “mono” which means single or only while the second part is the word comes from γένος and γίνομαι (the verb form) which means “kind/type” and “to become” making the translation “one of a kind” or “unique” son more understandable - He is “the only one of His kind” son
- c. This translation is the only way to describe the coming of Christ into this world and in flesh
- d. Either way, though, it does not hinder us when translated “only begotten” seeing that it is in reference to His being born on this earth and never in reference to His existence before coming to this world

D. The Person and Deity of the Holy Spirit - John 14:26; 15:26; 16:5-15

1. Many question two major points regarding the Holy Spirit, that being His personality and deity

The definite article is not in the Greek either but is used to clarify Who is being addressed in the English translations - the absence of the article is not an issue in light of the numerous passages identifying both His personality and part of the Godhead

- a. Some cults, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, do not capitalize “Holy Spirit” in reference to the Spirit and often leave out definite article (in English) attempting to focus on the neuter gender used in reference to Him
- b. He certainly is demonstrated as having personality in His own use of the pronoun “Me” in passages such as Acts 13:2, “..Separate to Me... the work that I have called them”
- c. In Acts 10:19-20 - The Spirit speaks to Peter regarding the Gentiles coming to him in regards to the vision he had while resting
- d. It should not surprise us that the Holy Spirit (He) is often overlooked realizing His purpose clarified in John 15:26 to “testify” of Christ - and in 16:14 He will glorify Christ
 - He comes from the Father - “From beside the Father” as in the preceding clause.” RWP

2. We are commanded not to grieve Him - Eph. 4:30

- a. He is ascribed the emotion of grief (sorrow or heaviness) - this is brought on by our inconsistent behavior and living
- b. As God, He is the “seal” (the assurance, proof) of our salvation
- c. “..the Greek implies that the sealing was done already once for all. It is the Father “BY” whom believers, as well as the Son Himself, were sealed (Joh 6:27). The Spirit is represented as itself the seal. Here the Spirit is the element IN which the believer is sealed, His gracious influences being the seal itself.” JFB

3. He (not a force) is said to pray for us (in our stead) - Rom. 8:26-27

- a. He is described, literally as taking the other side of the load (burden) and interceding on our behalf - this He does and knowing the thoughts of God being the Spirit of God
- b. He intercedes for us with “groanings too deep for words” and this in perfect accordance with God (all because we do not know how to really pray)

4. The “unpardonable sin” is that which is done against the Holy Spirit - Mt. 12:31-32

- a. In a basic sense, the sin against the Spirit is that of active disbelief and attributing the work of the Spirit to the devil (as clarified in Mark 3:28-29)
- b. Even the sins committed against the Son (as done during Christ’s life on the earth) were forgivable but not that against the Spirit - in this life or in the age to come!

5. The Spirit is the source of our enablement to do what we are called to do as clarified in passages that deal with the gifts He instills - I Cor. 12; Rom. 12

6. Then, He is referred to directly as God by Peter in Acts 5:3-4 - the lie was not to me but to God (after clarifying that they had lied to the Holy Spirit)

7. In II Pet. 1:21 we are told that men of God were inspired to write (by the Holy Spirit) were said to have spoken by God

8. More will be discussed and reviewed when the Holy Spirit is covered specifically

E. We cannot miss any person of the Godhead, for in so doing, we will miss or underestimate the complete and perfect working of God in all things

1. As the Father being He who wills and oversees what will happen and how it must be done
2. The Son (Christ) as God working it all out Himself
3. As the Spirit, enabling the work to be done in us
4. So there must be an ultimate will, a doer of the will and an enabler of the outworking of the will

VI. The Decree of God

A. What is meant by the “decree of God”?

1. A “decree” as mankind looks on it, is an order or command to be carried out
2. With God though, this term carries far greater significance
 - a. It is a term used to describe His purpose, counsel, will, sovereignty and command
 - b. It is in reference to His plan for all things and by which all that was to happen happens
 - c. “His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.” - Westminster Shorter Catechism
 - d. B.B. Warfield clarified regarding the decree of God, “In the infinite wisdom of the Lord of all the earth, each event falls with exact precision into its proper place in the unfolding of His divine plan. Nothing, however small, however strange, occurs without His ordering, or without its particular fitness for its place in the working out of His purpose; and the end of all shall be the manifestation of His glory, and the accumulation of His praise.”
3. The term “decree” is used in the singular, because with God (especially considering His eternity) does not decree but HAS decreed what will be (though, in time, we see it work out in sequence)
4. This concept of God is one of the greatest pivotal points in all of theology - is the great “fork in the road” that separates the bulk of professing Christianity
 - a. Many object to its teaching or even honestly dealing with the concept because of potential responses or even past responses that have been divisive
 - b. Many fear it because of the feared “fatalism” it is believed to produce - this will be dealt with later in this study, but is often the greatest “reasoning” invoked against this truth - many believe the realization of absolute control lends to the robbery of ambition

B. Some of the introductory references (for our purposes) in Scripture for this concept

1. Eph. 1:9,11 - “having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself.. in whom we have also obtained an inheritance, being marked out beforehand according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will,” (DBY)
 - a. His will being His predeterminate will (versus a wish)
 - b. This predetermined will was based upon His “good pleasure” - what God desires to be will be and it will constitute what is “good”
 - c. This good will was “purposed in Himself” - literally “determined” without outside counsel
2. Eph. 3:11 - “In accordance with that purpose which runs through all the ages and which he has now accomplished in Jesus, the Christ, our Master.” (TCNT)
 - a. It is not just a “purpose” as we would intend something to happen.. it is His predetermination at work throughout all time - in the case of this verse it was the predetermined plan of God in Christ (the redemptive/atoning plan through Christ)
 - b. The reason for this was the revelation of the “manifold wisdom of God”
 - c. This is in contrast to our limited wisdom, “The sovereignty of God is often questioned because man does not understand what God is doing. Because He does not act as we think He should, we conclude He cannot act as we think He would.” Jerry Bridges
3. Acts 2:23; 4:27-28 - “.. this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men... for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place.” (RSV)
 - a. This “definite plan” being literally a “decreed purpose”
 - b. When it references the “plan” being “predestined” it is referencing a purpose set to happen before it happened
4. Even verses like Prov. 16:33 demonstrate this concept - “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.” (KJV)
 - a. In the strictest reality, nothing happens by chance - even to the throwing of dice
 - b. In this same chapter is it made evident that even the wicked were made for a specific purpose - they being made “for the day of evil” - 16:4
 - c. It is absurd for any to believe that God is sovereign only in His authority and not in His absolute control - predetermination cannot exist without absolute control

Foreknowledge demands
predetermination

5. God's limitless control to decree, distinguishes Him from all other "gods" - Isa 46:5-11

- a. Since chapter 40, God has been comparing Himself to all others that man has sought to compare with God or replace Him
- b. The clarification, "I am God" carries more with it than a title - it is declare the actuality of His sovereignty/control over all things (even the sinful, as seen in this passage)
- c. There is none like Him and no there (He is absolutely unique) especially considering..
 - (1). He "declares the end from the beginning" - "Declaring from the beginning the latter end, and from of old that which hath not been done, Saying, 'My counsel doth stand, And all My delight I do'." (YLT)
 - (2). He "announces" from the beginning of all "things" what the end will be
 - (3). His "counsel" (plan, deliberation) will be the one that endures (in contrast to all other plans and deliberations) - see also Pr. 19:21

It is interesting to realize that God is never "frustrated"

See also Pr. 21:29-31 — (4). He does (without deterrence and possibility of failure) whatever He pleases

- d. God "declares" (decrees) what will happen to do all He purposed to do and have done, with the focus to do His "good pleasure" - He being the definer of what is good

6. As mentioned in Acts 15:18, God knows all His works "from the beginning"

- a. To know all that He would do, and for it to happen absolutely, He had to have control
- b. It cannot be that He was just reactionary - some may claim that God knew all that would happen and reveals it (like an exceptional prophet) though this does not account for how God would do all **His** will - to do so He would have to dictate what would ultimately happen (at some point) regardless of what man would do
- c. No matter how anyone looks at this, God would have to exercise control, so the real issue is whether He has total and absolute control all the time over all things - this will be discussed later with an attempts to harmonize it with "free agency"

C. A few logical considerations to include in our discussion

1. Logic and reason are not evil in and of themselves - only when they are controlled by sin or a disregard for faith as being preeminent

Ill-informed logic always leads to error which will also contribute to "faith-robbers"

"In literature a paradox can be any contradictory or obviously untrue statement, which resolves itself upon later inspection."

Just as in Hermeneutics, we must have boundaries and lines we will not and cannot cross: in Theology, these lines are found in the "fundamentals" from which all other ideas are to "spring"

- a. Reason, just like our brains, is from God (as is language)
- b. Scripture Truth will never contradict logic though it may surpass our reason - logic is basically the harmony (non-contradiction) of thoughts, though it is utterly dependent upon one's source of information and, to some degree, the amount of information
- c. Continuous study of Scripture will connect the logical "dots" over time and is one of the fundamental reasons for faith being over logic: not because faith is illogical, but because faith (reliance) will keep us looking and learning (which assuredly leads to revelation and illumination) - this is true with any "line of reasoning"
- d. There will be "paradoxes" but never contradictions! - eternity will reveal harmony of thought, purpose and action on the part of God (over and above **our** disharmony, disobedience, failures and the like) - so why would we ever assume illogic with God? - it is supremely illogical for us to deny the control of the Creator!
- e. It is essential in this discussion that we conclude what is and must be true before we allow ourselves to consider (too thoroughly) the ramifications - far too often we are apt to jump ahead in our thinking and fear where a conclusion might lead us - so often, maturity involves being "forced" into reality before we come to grips with reality! - much of what "makes sense" to us as adults, seemed absurd to our immature and uninformed minds as children

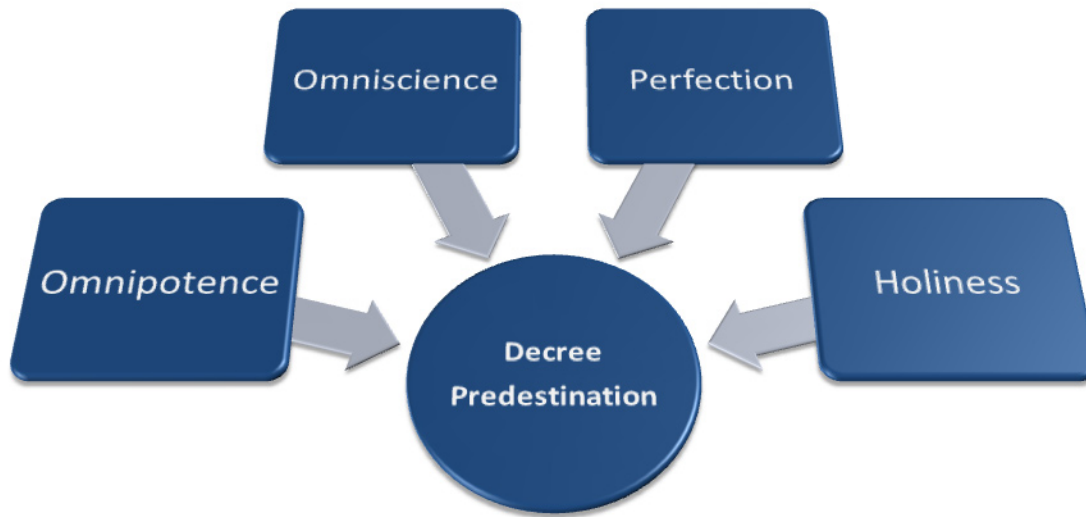
2. Knowing that God is omnipotent, what can there be out from under His control?

- a. We concluded this attribute earlier in this study, so how far reaching are its ramifications?
- b. As attributed to Christ in Col. 1:15-17, "In Him all things hold together" and, as mentioned in verse 16, "all things" are "for Him"
- c. This reality of God's power is one of the fundamentals that is to be authoritative over all our other considerations

3. Knowing that God is omniscient, He knows all that will happen, so all that does happen is not apart from His knowledge - and, since He has all power, He could have altered what happened

4. Since God is perfect and righteous, all things that He controls and knows will happen must fall under the jurisdiction of perfection

Theological Fundamentals



The problem: People, most often, begin a study on the decree/sovereignty/predetermination areas of Theology and immediately “run” to address some initial questions regarding the freedom/free will of man. Once they establish (from experience and bias) that man must be “free”, then they go back to finish the study in Theology building on the wrong foundation. We must first conclude God’s ultimate power/control before we can address anthropology (man). The order of this study must be based on priorities of rank - God first, man second

5. So, realizing the creator is perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present and is morally flawless in all He thinks, desires and does, we **must** conclude (logically, based upon the facts of our source) that His plan and purposes are absolute

This is more than He can do anything.. everything exists under His power

The plan is as perfect as the planner!

- a. Thus His absolute plan must happen absolutely and in perfect detail because He has all power and this demands all control - anything less than all control is less than omnipotent
- b. Thus all will happen as planned because He knows all things (potential and actual) and not one thing or concept could be beyond His knowing (perfectly) and understanding
- c. Thus all that happens must happen and be constantly under the jurisdiction of His power and understanding occurring perfectly as planned - to assume otherwise is to demand either some form of impotence on the part of God or lack of insight/foresight and even imperfection in His reign over all things
- d. To allow the idea that anything happens beyond His power, His knowing or out of the scope of His perfection is to open the “door” to unholiness in God (in what He does or allows)
- e. These fundamental attributes of God demand predetermination - there can be no other possibility without compromising one of these attributes!

6. This is fundamental reasoning, to observe what goes into something to determine the “quality” of what comes out of it - this is essential in our “observations,” seeing that much of what we see surpasses our limited frame of reference and realizing that our judgements will be flawed (knowing we are not omnipotent, omniscient, perfect and holy)

- a. So, when my understanding is confused and cannot discern the purpose in what I see or know, I am left with one of two basic choices:

- (1). Turn on God, permit bitterness and despair, standing in judgement of God
- (2). “Retreat” to the solid foundations of these fundamentals of God keeping focus on the planner of the plan and not on the incidentals of the plan - the plan is not finished being worked out

- b. This is essential also to keep our pride in check as Nebuchadnezzar learned in Dan. 4:19-37

- (1). Even after being warned by Daniel, he allowed himself to believe the greatness he saw around him was of his own doing and power
- (2). God, as promised, humbled him until he realized God’s sovereignty

Purposeless randomness

7. It is also logical to conclude that the outworking of God’s plan will appear to occur by chance or even in error when we are not looking to see it beyond our “wisdom” - I Cor. 1:25

8. So, following the logic of Scripture, we realize that God is a sovereign God being all-powerful, knowing all things, perfect in all He is and does and is morally flawless in Who He is. Being all this, we cannot accept a flawed plan, purpose or outworking in anything He does (actively or passively). And, since all is under His jurisdiction and realizing that all power, life and ability are “borrowed” from Him, nothing can happen apart from His plan or out from under His authority - this leads us to the absolute conclusion that all that happens had to have been planned (for to have not been planned God either did not know or did not have the power to control it), is always under His control and must perfectly fit into His perfect plan and is being executed without any possibility of imperfection in the plan knowing the perfection of the planner!

D. The decree of God is His purposed plan - Psalm 33:1-11; II Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:9-12; I Chron. 29:11-12

1. This is seen clearest in God’s plan and fulfillment of His redemptive work in, for and to us

a. Starting with Ephesians 1, we realize God had this planned before He created all things

(1). To know for sure and to make it happen, His plan had to have absolute control, else He would have just been speculating or “hoping”

(2). His “choosing of us in Him before the foundation of the world” is clear

b. This “choosing out” (electing) was for the specific purpose - to be “holy” (set apart) and “blameless” (without flaw) - Eph. 1:4

c. And, lest any think He just planned the process and not the individuals, the next verse clarifies He “predestined” us - He predetermined before it happened what would happen (and in this case it regards our being made perfect before Him in Christ) - Eph. 1:5

• He predetermined us to be His children (by adoption) into His “family” by means of Christ, all based upon (determined to be so) by the “good intention of His will” - He wanted to do it so He planned/determined it to be

d. It is crucial to realize that for God to predetermine anything He had to predetermine

everything! - it is the only way to be absolutely sure of anything - even with us, when we predetermine with what we consider an absolute certainty something to happen, we still fear, knowing that something (out of our control) could happen and alter it - only absolute control is absolutely sure!

e. The predetermined purpose for doing this was to His praise - specifically the praise of the glory of His grace and that being gratuitously given to us as being in the “Beloved” (Christ) - vs. 6

f. This predetermined (foreordained) plan would involve “redemption” (buying back from slavery to sin which God knew (ordained) to also take place) - and this “through His blood”

g. He would fulfill all His own demands in Christ by the “forgiving of our trespasses” - literally the pardon (remission) of our offenses - as planned before the foundation of the world

h. It is interesting to note, that as part of the answer as to why God allowed evil, it is evident that He (of His good will) ordained sin to work out His redemptive plan and to evidence fully the “glory of His grace”

i. This grace is evidenced (in contrast to sin and our undeserving state) was “lavished” on us (more than would be deemed needed) - or as in Eph. 2:7, “..the surpassing riches of his grace”

j. This is what was the “mystery of His will” - and this will was and is an absolute demonstration of wisdom and “insight” (or intelligence/genius) - ultimately in reference to His plan “which He purposed in Him” (“purposed” meaning to set something in place before)

k. “He purposes in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in Heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in Him.” - Phillips translation of Eph. 1:10 - in other words, God predetermined the outcome

l. And, in case there is further doubt of all this working perfectly to His plan, Paul clarifies that we have already been given (obtained) and inheritance, we who have been “predetermined” to receive such in accordance to His purpose - and who is it that purposed this? He who “works all things after the counsel of His will”

2. The previous point is a good example of at least one thing being predetermined and not just redeeming of us, but also His means; the crucifixion of Christ - this required perfect precision also to have it happen not just in the correct way, but at the precise time that it did

a. We will pursue other “predeterminations” but as discussed earlier, if just one absolute thing has been predetermined, all must be predetermined to ensure its absolute fulfillment

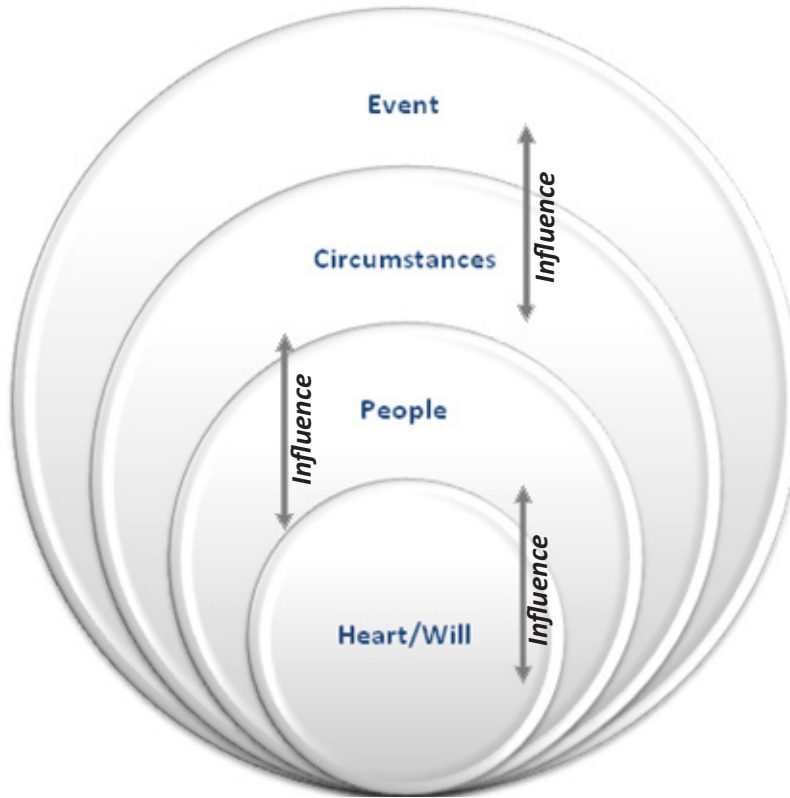
see Psalm 103:19

see also Job 34:14-15

“From the first he destined us, in his good-will towards us, to be adopted as Sons through Jesus Christ,” (TCNT)

This may also carry the idea that we have been given as an inheritance

- b. To have one event predetermined, there had to be other events/circumstances controlled
- c. As the diagram below illustrates, in every event there is the interaction and involvement of



many different areas. For instance, to affect a person or people, their heart and will must be affected by something within or without (typically from without) causing them to act upon or instigate circumstances. These circumstances come together to form an event or a series of events. Then, the events and circumstances often influence and in some ways, dictate the actions, reactions and ultimately (for good or bad) the heart and will of the person or persons.

d. So, at a high and very basic level, this demonstrates that for God to predetermine an event (just one event) all the particulars that would lead up to that event had to be predetermined. And, since each of these general categories is typically made-up of or controlled by other wills, people, circumstances or events, it is reasonable to conclude that, if we could trace every detailed connection of every detailed event, we would discover God's decree dictating it all! And, if that is not amazing and overwhelming enough, He does all this utilizing rational, reasoning, and willing instruments to bring it all about. This does not imply coercive control or

It must be noted, though, that "force" is sometimes obvious in God's will usurping our will as in the case of Jonah or even Saul/ Paul

"robotish" interactions with God and His absolute decree, just omniscient insight and planning!
- Rom. 11:36; Isa. 41:4

- e. Acts 15:18 - "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." (KJV) - Albert Barnes remarks on this verse, "God sees everything future; he knows what he will accomplish; he has a plan; and all his works are so arranged in his mind, that he sees all things distinctly and clearly. As he foretold these, it was a part of his plan; and as it was a part of his plan long since foretold, it should not be opposed and resisted by us."
- f. We are often so guilty of fighting for our "freedom" and independence (personally) that we cannot properly identify with the "slave" terminology Paul, Peter, James, Jude and others identified themselves with, constantly calling themselves the "bond slave" of Christ, God and righteousness - Rom. 6, Titus 1:1, James 1:1; II Pet. 1:1
- g. It is important to remember also that innumerable categories influence why we do what we do, how it's done and when it's done. Areas such as trends, society, friends, health, education, emotions, coincidence, opportunity, other people's wills, and so on, have an incalculable impact on our wills, desires and decision making
- h. So, God's purposed plan (decree) is assured to happen and will assuredly happen utilizing and controlling (detailed scrutiny) all elements of creation and time

3. The basic positions regarding predestination

- a. Actual Predetermination (associated with Calvinism and Reformed Theology)
 - (1). Not to be confused with determinism which communicates a "force" vs. person
 - (2). Seeing God is all-powerful, all-knowing and infinite all must be predetermined
- b. Cooperative Determination (associated with Arminiansim)
 - (1). They say that God is infinite but limits Himself (a high level/general "determination")
 - (2). Some question His actual knowledge of what is to come (in attempt to explain and defend free will in man and a sense of fairness with God)
- c. Self-Determination (associated with Deism and Humanism)
 - (1). They believe there is a God but He does not directly interfere or intervene
 - (2). Man's choices and efforts ultimately determine destiny

Even if we truly had a "free will" we would want it to be bound to the will of God!

d. No-Determination (Atheism / Humanism)

These say there is no God, no plan,
no purpose - all is by chance

- (1). These hold to the idea that we have no set future and no determined purpose but that we make of ourselves what we become
- (2). All responsibility and credit essentially belong to us (with some agreeing to a concept of "luck" also being at work - though this would be determined to be random chance)

E. Levels of responsibility in light of God's decree and predestination

1. If God is over all (the good and the evil) then how are we to look upon personal responsibility as well as the areas of responsibility that deal with guilt and reward?

- a. Far too often we are guilty of taking these concepts and rather than finding comfort or motivation in doing what is right (God-given responsibility), we use them to "consume them upon our own lusts" (as the immoral prayers referenced in James 4:3)
- b. We are and will always be held accountable for our actions - for believers, the rewards for faithfulness and loss of reward for our neglect - II Cor. 5:10; I Cor. 3
- c. Why obey, why pray? - we are to assume (in faith) that God has decreed to fulfill His will utilizing several instruments such as our prayers and obedience - and we must be motivated to be those desiring to be used to fulfill God's unchangeable plan for the good not for the evil - the outworkings of evil will ultimately be used of God to glorify His righteousness, holiness and omniscience, but those (individuals) so utilized will not profit from it!
- d. God will hold the vessels of wrath accountable for their evil works - this we know, even though it is an unchangeable part of God's decree, based upon passages such as Rom. 9:18-21 and Isa. 45:9 (though take careful note of the context Isa. 45:1-13) God will righteously and justly find fault in them and hold them accountable
- e. A good "rule of thumb" to follow in our thinking is to consider all evil that comes from and through us as being our fault and we are responsible for it, while that which is good and comes from and through us as being totally of God and His working, with no true credit due to ourselves - Php. 2:12-16; II Cor. 3:5; Heb. 13:20-21

So God gets all ultimate "credit" for the good that is done and the honor and respect of the ultimate utilization of evil to demonstrate His limitless power to do all that is right and to His glory - either way, God is over all and will never lose any level of control and sovereignty

2. God does not "shy away" from His sovereignty over sin and the utilization of it for His purposes

Passages such as those describing Rahab using lies to hide the spies do not justify lying for God's purposes, just that He can use whatever He chooses for His purposes, and that always without sin - Jos. 2:4

Rahab was saved for her faith in the God of Israel, not for her "sacrificial lies" for a good cause

See also Ex. 14:17 and Psalms 105:25

More illustrations can be found in Joshua 11:20, Jud. 3:12, 9:22-23, 14:1-4, I Sam. 2:25; 16:14

Just as we would expect a physician to utilize chemicals and other "tools" that are essentially "poison" for a greater purpose, so only God could know how and when to ordain evil for the "greater good". When we seek to sin and contradict the righteousness of God and see ourselves doing it for the greater good, we are always wrong in it!

- a. These passages that we will be discussing have often been troubling to those seeing evil and sin as, in some degree, out from under the jurisdiction of God's control and even God's use. These passages and concepts must be faced if we are to be sure that God is truly omnipotent, omniscient and sovereign and that His decree is definite, final and sure
- b. If we start with an easy one, we could look at God's working in the life of Joseph - Gen. 45:5 and Gen. 50:20 - His brothers did evil with evil intent and yet Joseph, in retrospect, was able to see how God sovereignly used their evil to save he and them
- c. As Paul used to illustrate the point of God's absolute control in all things, Pharaoh was used, in his hard-heartedness, to demonstrate the power of God over the strongest nation in the world at that time - Rom. 9:14-18; Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8
 - (1). There have been creative answers seeking to work their way around what appears to them as God doing what is wrong
 - (2). In verses such as Ex. 8:15 we see that Pharaoh also hardened his own heart
 - (3). We must be direct, first of all, and ask, "Is it wrong for God to harden the heart of a sinful man who chooses also to harden his own heart? Either way, who are we to say God cannot "pit" His will against the will of a man to show His power?"
- d. Some of the more difficult passages are found in the later life of David
 - (1). II Sam. 12:11-12 which is fulfilled in II Sam. 16:22 - God, in response to the sin of David with Bath-Sheba, declares what He will do to David
 - (2). II Sam. 16:5-14 where Shimei curses David and David declares, "... Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him."
 - (3). Clearly, one of the most difficult examples is found in II Sam. 24:1 where David is said to have been prompted to number the people - some versions have this as God Himself doing this to David though others clarify it as God's anger or "an adversary" incited David to do this - Satan is given credit for this "incitement" in I Chron. 21:1 but David also takes the blame for his sin - I Sam. 24:10

3. God utilizes evil and evil instruments for His purposes

Evil is not an “outside entity” but is known to be evil only because God has clarified it and its concepts as such - without God telling us something is wrong, it (in and of itself) would not be wrong

- a. It is again essential that we keep a clear idea of what is meant by “evil” - in its most basic essence and idea, evil is whatever stands in opposition to God’s righteousness - this is what makes it evil: and from our perspective, evil is also in the category of “calamity” and other circumstances and situations that oppose our comfort and ideas of good
- b. This is a point many have lost sight over the centuries and, as a result, stumble over the concept of God’s control over evil for His purpose and in harmony with His decree - to lose this truth is to fear trouble and despair over their potential results
- c. God makes it clear in passages such as Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6; Lam. 3:38-38; Acts 2:23

The danger when facing calamity is when we take an accusing posture toward God or truly see what happens as purposeless (vain)

(1). Do not, as unbelievers, look upon these evil things as against us as much as looking upon them as being “for” God’s purpose and glory - II Thes. 2; I Pet. 2:4-12

(2). It is precisely illustrated in the example of Job - Job 1 - see esp. verses 21-22

(3). Here Job ascribes his loss to God - “The Lord gives and takes away...” - and Job did not commit folly by ascribing (charging) folly to God - folly being what is useless

- d. A vivid example of this point is also found in I Kings 22:19-23 - Micaiah clarifies precisely to Ahab what God has done in using a deceiving spirit with the other “prophets”

(1). Once again, God had it so the “odds” seemed to be stacked against His word and prophet, and as with Gideon, God actively worked to make it seem even worse

(2). The fulfillment of His word looked as though it would be an impossibility with the “conspiring” work of the false prophets and the disguise of Ahab - and the fulfillment was, in itself, in defiance of all odds when a bowman, “drew his bow at random” and hit Ahab

- e. God, many times, actively used evil people and evil circumstances to chasten, punish and redirect Israel - one such explanation is in Amos 4:6-13

4. We must be careful to never judge calamities by our own perception as Christ clarified to those who questioned the purpose of God’s control in a couple tragedies - Luke 13:1-5

- a. The first group of Galileans were deemed by some as deserving what they received because of their wickedness, though others may have questioned that such as happening would be allowed when these were offering sacrifices in the temple

- b. Christ, taking it out of the context of those who may seem to suffer because of their particular “evils” adds another situation, where some suffered a horrible fate (part of a tower falling on them) as they passed by - this clearly being an act of God

- c. Rather than focusing on the “worthiness” of the seeming victims, focus on our individual accountability to the One over all

5. “If we were to say that God himself does evil, we would have to conclude that he is not a good and righteous God, and therefore that he is not really God at all. On the other hand, if we maintain that God does not use evil to fulfill his purposes, then we would have to admit that there is evil in the universe that God did not intend, is not under his control, and might not fulfill his purposes. This would make it very difficult for us to affirm that ‘all things’ work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). If evil came into the world in spite of the fact that God did not intend it and did not want it to be there, then what guarantee do we have that there will not be more and more evil that he does not intend and that he does not want? And what guarantee do we have that he will be able to use it for his purposes, or even that he can triumph over it? Surely this is an undesirable alternative position.” - Wayne Grudem

F. Concluding thoughts regarding God’s decree, predestination and providence

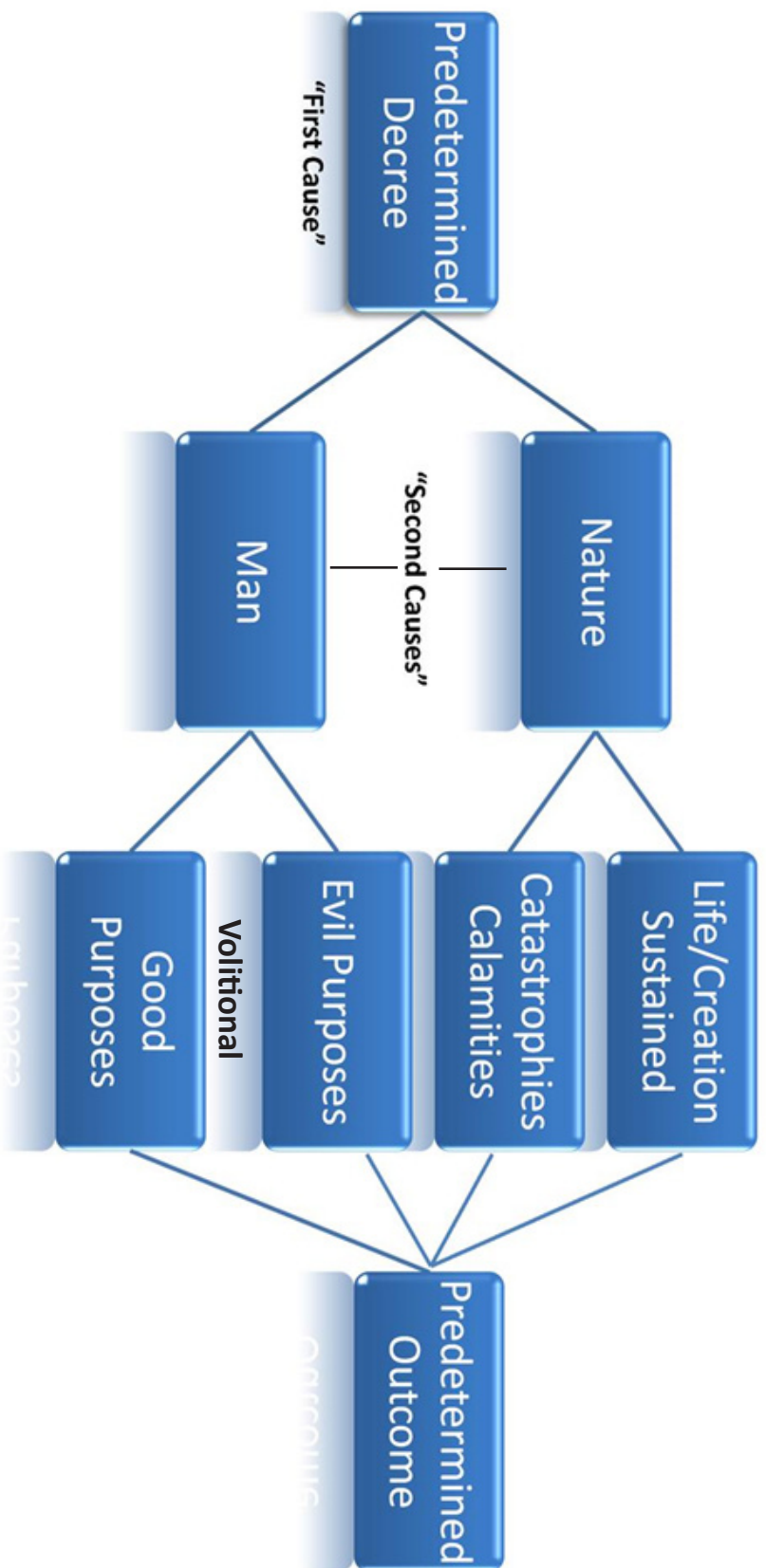
1. It is true that both concepts of God’s decree/control and man’s willful actions and choices are taught and illustrated throughout Scripture, but it would be dishonest on our part to attempt to portray these as equal in effect, power and influence

- a. To conclude that God knows because He foresaw what would happen is to discount His eternity, omniscience and omnipotence

- b. He knows what will happen because He decreed it to be so not because He saw it coming

2. As clarified earlier, this is the core of our hope - take away the control of God in all areas and at all levels and we are left to question the seemingly small and even larger events in our lives as possibly being out of the will and plan of God - this cannot be allowed if our faith is to remain strong!

God's Decree Through "Second Causes"



3. This point of doctrine has a direct affect on crucial areas of our lives

The understanding of the decree of God instills the fear of the Lord clearly identifying the “Boss”

Thus the need to add knowledge to virtue (love (and awareness) of what is right and best) and all this founded on faith - II Pet. 1:5

The fear of the Lord is both sobering and encouraging at the same time - sobering in the realization of His power and control especially in light of our natural rebellion to Him and yet it is encouraging in the midst or potential onset of trials and circumstances that would cause us to fear

- a. It is the “awe” that lends strength (to us) for the Fear of the Lord - God’s sovereignty and decree keep our focus on the controller more than the circumstances or “second causes”
 - (1). The fear of the Lord is essential to wisdom - Psa. 111:10 - it sets our perspective allowing our thinking/reasoning and ultimately our conclusions to be correct
 - (2). The fear of the Lord is essential to knowledge - Pr. 1:7 - knowledge and facts lack full usability when lacking or avoiding the sovereignty of God
 - (3). The fear of the Lord is essential to hating evil - Pr. 8:13 - it is interesting to note when referencing evil the terms “pride” and “arrogance” both of which emanate from an over estimation of our own importance and control
 - (4). The fear of the Lord is essential to warding off the fear of man (which can also be seen in the fear of self)
 - (5). The fear of the Lord is essential to dealing with envy - Pr. 23:17 - envy comes when we look on life and circumstances as being unfair which, when believed and yielded to, evidences our losing sight of Who is in control
 - (6). The fear of the Lord is the key influence that sets our association priorities - Deut. 13:1-4 - who we follow and long to be associated with is dictated by who/what receives our reverential fear and respect
- b. It is the perspective setter/controller that wards off worry and enables an outlook of optimism and resolve, realizing God’s hand at work in and over all things - worry stems from either our fear of being able to control circumstances to our satisfaction, or from our seeing another entity as being “too big” to handle (almost as if being independent of God or stronger than God)
 - Worry can also be caused by a misinformed idea of God - if I do not recognize His goodness, grace and righteousness, I may dread His control and resist it
- c. Studying the decree/sovereignty of God dictates our perspective of Government - Rom. 13
 - (1). We must not allow ourselves to see or portray governments as being rogue/out from under God’s control
 - (2). “Let every soul to the higher authorities be subject, for there is no authority except from God, and the authorities existing are appointed by God” (YLT)
 - (3). The instruction to submit to these authorities becomes clearer when realizing nothing escapes the control of God
- d. The entire concept of success is redefined once God’s control is understood
 - (1). Success is seen only in the submissive cooperation with the Working of God
 - (2). Failure (no matter the perceived outcome) is seen to be in independence or resistance to the working of God
- e. The above, in turn, affects how we set our schedules and goals - both are subject to change based upon God’s working and both, over time, begin to focus on the learning and identifying of God’s working - Pr. 16:1,3,9 (man proposes; God disposes)
- f. Submitting to God’s authority and control helps properly govern our idea of reputation (our idea of success being inward focused while reputation is outward)
 - (1). It may be “sacrificed” in our obedience to God’s commands
 - (2). We can yield it up understanding our standing for God outranks our standing with those of this earth/age that see themselves in control
- g. In day to day life, focus is revolutionized with this understanding - we then come to see beyond the circumstances that are taking place around us always seeking out the work of God in these “second causes” which, in turn, causes us to be focused upon His purposes
- h. At a high level, our ideas of life, death and health are also altered with this understanding
 - (1). This is evidenced in Paul’s statement in Rom. 14:8 - “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” (KJV)
 - (2). Health is seen as God’s grace to do what we are created to do and sickness is seen to glorify God’s working through it to honor His name/grace or to redirect our focus to one of dependence

It dictates the inward idea of success which is most important

- i. This concept has a direct affect over all our learning and observations
 - (1). Once this concept is accepted, why we learn becomes more a searching *out* and researching *what* God has done, is doing and will do
 - (2). Learning and observation become more discovery than they do ingenuity and personal genius - interestingly enough they incline us more to being worshipers!
 - (3). The historian becomes more a “scribe” of the outworkings of God’s decree, the scientist a “prophet” revealing the previously hidden aspects of the intricacies of God’s creation and the engineer an obedient servant to the “laws” and standards that are revealed to be in the physical determination of the creation

VII. The Will of God - Eph. 1:11; 5:17; Rom. 12:1-2; Rev. 4:11

A. Aspects of the term “the will of God”

1. There are differing phrases and words we use to describe the ideas involved
 - a. It is in reference to God’s control when used as His “predetermined will” - in this case that being what He decrees (wills) to come to pass, in what way, by what means and in such timing
 - b. It is in reference to His “desire” - that being what is in harmony with His character (heart)
 - c. It is in reference to His holiness so described as His “moral will” - this being the source for the absolute determination of what is innately right and wrong - it is such only in and as much as it (anything or concept) adheres and is submissive to what He declares as right and wrong through the declared law, the inner law (as in Romans 2) and through declarations through His “second causes” such as governments and properly informed consciences
 - d. And then, with great caution, we often use the term “permissive will” when looking to describe what is allowed to happen under the predetermined will of God and yet contradicts His moral will and His expressed “desire”
2. There are terms such as “revealed will” and “secret will” that are often used to describe moral obligation, responsibly, and the discovered outworkings of what God does and shows
 - a. The first “revealed” will it is what we have seen God do as well as what He has declared we are to be doing and are to look to be doing/thinking
 - b. The second being what will take place in accordance with His predetermined will that we do not know and will not know till the time comes (such as the reference, “if the Lord wills” in James 4:15) or God reveals it directly

B. Fundamental concepts to understand when considering the will of God

1. The “freedom of God” - it is important we look upon the concept of God’s will as being “most free” as He is described in the Westminster Confession
 - a. When discussing His “freedom” it is typically defined as, “... that attribute of God whereby He does whatever He pleases.”
 - b. In the exercise of His will (in any capacity) is under no external authority to Himself - there are no external restraints to His doing as He knows best
 - c. God is contrasted in Psalm 115:1-8 to all other “gods” with the entire concept beginning with, “Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to thy name give glory, for the sake of thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness!” (RSV) - then in verse 3, “He does whatever He pleases”
 - d. In Daniel 4:35 a repentant and enlightened Nebuchadnezzar, “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of the heavens, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (DBY)
 - e. God needs no defense because He is not answerable to anyone - this is why we must not seek to portray God’s will as being helpless - what He wills may be grievous to Himself, but this is definitely how He willed it to be!
2. “God is He for Whose will no cause or ground may be laid down as its rule and standard; for nothing is on a level with it or above it, but it is itself the rule for all things. If any rule or standard, or cause or ground, existed for it, it could no longer be the will of God. What God wills is not right because he ought, or was bound, so to will; on the contrary, what takes place must be right, because He so wills it. Causes and grounds are laid down for the will of the creature, but not for the will of the Creator - unless you set another Creator over Him!” - Martin Luther

Actually God is the only true person in all creation that is free - all else is influences, controlled or restrained in some capacity - clearly God has willed for others (including us) to have varying levels of “freedom”, but none has absolute freedom but God

3. The will of God is what we are to set the focus of our lives to learning, discovering and following and His will is primarily seen/found by us in His Word

It's easy to outwardly honor and praise God's Word (as revealing His will) but it is far more rare to have it lived and followed in one's inner thoughts and character

- a. Author Pink stated, "A great deal of mystical vagueness and puzzling uncertainty will be removed if the reader substitutes for, "Is this according to God's will?" the simpler and more tangible, "Is this according to God's Word?" . He then went on to point out that, often, when dealing with the concept of God's Word, "Many are zealous in reading 'the letter of Scripture,' and many are charmed with the evidences of its divine Authorship. But how few realize the primary purpose for which God gave the Scriptures; how few make a *practical use* of them - ordering the details of their lives by its rules and regulations. **They eulogize the lamp, but they do not walk by its light.**" - A. Pink - "The Nature of God"
- b. This is why the instruction in Eph. 5:17 begins with literally, "Don't be stupid" (mindless/foolish), but be understanding (comprehending by learning and putting the learned thoughts together) regarding what the will of the Lord is

4. When thinking about the concept of God's will, many err by starting with the question, "What is the will of God for my life?" - the fundamental error is found in the priority of such a question! It is not as much God's will for "me" as much as it is God's will period.

See Col. 1:16-17, Rev. 4:11; Rom. 11:36

- a. As discussed at length earlier, life is about, from and for God, not us - thus we see our most significant and defining purpose in the question, "What is God's will?" and then, while seeking it out in His Word through His Spirit, we strive to act in submissive harmony with it
- b. Our purpose then (in the real "scheme" of things) is the discovery of God's will (determined, desired and moral) rather than the discovery of some "exclusive" purpose of God surrounding "me"
- c. Much of the study of God and His workings is distorted when we (acting egotistically) primarily see God in relation to ourselves rather than we in relation to Him
- d. It is essential that, when considering God's will in, through and over all things, we consider the rebuke of Job by God - God simply asking questions, cornered the actual or potential judgment of Job against the working and will of God - Job 38-41 and then Job's repentant response in Job 42:1-6 - It is not to be ranked as our priority to agree with or like the will of God (actually or potentially) as much as it should be to learn it and humbly obey it

5. So, much of our purpose is found in following the command in Rom. 12:2 to have our "mind renewed" with the outcome being the "proving" (discerning/seeing) that God's will is always "good" and well-pleasing and thoroughly complete!

Many are unwilling to not only seek out the actual will of God but refuse to follow it because they do not perceive its rightness

Doing God's will by submitting to what He has given me for the day proves to me His rightness. His truth is truth with or without my belief, but obedience/subservience makes it truth to me!

- a. Not discovering some obscure possibility that God may have for me, but being daily reassured that His will is always at work and that it is only my perspective (by discovery) that needs altering - we look to learn and do the will of God not determine it!
- b. This was a key point made by our Lord in John 7:17-18 - it all starts with a willingness to do His will, followed by a knowing (firsthand) that it is right
- c. "A principle of immense importance, showing, on the one hand, that singleness of desire to please God is the grand inlet to light on all questions vitally affecting one's eternal interests, and on the other, that the want of this, whether perceived or not, is the chief cause of infidelity amidst the light of revealed religion." JFB
- d. Again, the key is submission, not assertion - God initiates/wills, we respond !

6. One of the most difficult concepts is dealing with what may be called the "desired will of God"

- a. Passages such as Lam. 3:33, "For he doth not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men" seem contradictory with His predetermined will - see also Ezk. 33:11
- b. The term "willingly" in Lam. 3:33 literally means, "from the heart" picturing for us that God is not sadistic - vicious cruelty is not the character of God - it cannot indicate that He afflicts people against Himself (that He contradicts Himself as we so often do)
- c. But, as so many anthropomorphic passages do, God illustrates desire just as the knowledge of our desires reveals the character of our inner (real) self
- d. In the Lamentations verse, this point is further proven in 3:37-38 indicating that all that does happen is of His command
- e. His holy character is also seen in passages such as I Thes. 4:3 and 5:18 - verses such as these reveal to us God's "desire" which should then be seen as what our desire should be

- We study His will to direct where our desires should be

7. Based upon the previous points and verses, the clear will of God is revealed to us
 - a. It is God's will that we avoid sexual immorality and the related "defrauding" - I Thes. 4:3-8
 - (1). Sexual impurity is a distortion of His established purpose for sexuality
 - (2). God's "call" and purpose is to "sanctification" - a steady, growing separation from the temporal and self-focused emphasis and goals of the "age" in which we live
 - b. It is God's will that we "rejoice always", pray without ceasing" and that we "give thanks in everything" - I Thes. 5:18
 - (1). All of this finds its actual fulfillment in our confidence in His decreed will (determinative will) and in so doing, we follow His revealed, instructed will to trust His decreed will (which is the source to true rejoicing and praying)
 - (2). And this will is for those of us **in Christ Jesus**
 - c. It is God's will that we submit ourselves to "human institutions" - I Pet. 2:13-16
 - In verse 13, the purpose is to "silence the ignorance of foolish men" who, would be silenced by seeing a Godly, righteous responses to their wrong actions toward us
 - d. It is God's will that we suffer (at times) for doing what is right - I Pet. 3:17, 4:19
 - They point being that we "keeping our souls" to our "faithful creator"
 - e. God's will is to reveal the mysteries of His will as He pleases - Eph. 1:1-9
 - As we see this as His will we then steadily look for His will at work and the revealing of His will in His Word
 - f. These are just direct statements of following His will and yet by direct statement, by instruction, reproof, correction and example, we are shown His will for us daily
- C. So, in summary, the will of God is in reference to His Determination (plan over all), His Delight (what ever is in harmony with His character) and His Desire (what is in accordance with His ideal in His plan) - His will is over all (controlling), expressing outwardly His inward self (revealing) and is discovered in His Word and to be seen at work all around us
 1. It is what we are to pray for as in the model prayer of Mt. 6:10 - this prayer, not out of a possibility of it not being done, but out of an agreement for it to be so
 2. When perplexed, we are to surrender to God's will and trust Him, as exemplified in Acts 21:7-14
 - a. Difficulty in following God's will and living in it is not to be seen as easy, but as necessary for what is right and best - see Php. 1:27-2:11
 - b. Doing the will of God in the face of opposition and pain was demonstrated by our Lord for the purpose of God's glory in it (often to be revealed later)
 3. As we labor, daily, we are to see our service as being for the will of God - Eph. 6:5-6
 4. We are to take comfort that it is God's will to work in us to do His will - Heb. 13:20-21; Php. 1:6

We are to see our purpose in the learning of His will, the looking for His will at work and not to view His will and its rightness in light of its harmony with my will... it is always to be His will foremost and our will to service His will

VIII. A Synopsis of Theology Proper

- A. Theology is the created, limited being, studying God and organizing revealed concepts into categories
 1. There is no other field of study that better demonstrates our finiteness
 2. There is no other field of study more worthy of the bulk of our life's focus !
- B. God is incomprehensible - He can be known but cannot be fully known for Who and what He is
 1. He surpasses our understanding and will never fully fit into our "minds"
 2. This point does not discourage us from study of Him, on the contrary, it excites our research and thinking into God, resulting in a steadily growing awe and confidence built on Him
 - This is necessary in every generation to counter and surpass our "enamoration" with lesser beings and concepts - Ex. 15:11; Ps. 71:19; Ps. 113
 3. It is God's surpassing our comprehension that will further reveal His being infinite
- C. His existence is assumed in the Bible and denied by fools
 1. Atheism is not really the denial of God, but is the placing of self as God
 2. Creation reveals the existence of God through His work but not the knowability of God - who He is
- D. God is perfect as revealed in His attributes
 1. He is flawless and complete in Himself needing no other to complete Him or make Him better
 2. Learning this, we realize He cannot be improved or changed seeing that perfection cannot become more perfect and cannot become less of what it is
 - All terms and concepts used to describe His perfections are imperfect!

- E. God is Omniscient - He knows all that can be known
1. He knows everything about everything - He cannot learn because He knows it all anyway!
 - He does not, as we, need to take time to reason something out
 2. God's knowledge is simultaneous (immediate) versus successive (or linear) - He knows it all at once
 3. From our perspective, God's knowledge is foreknowledge because it is above time
 4. God is all-wise in that He perfectly (completely) knows how to use all His knowledge
- F. God is Omnipotent - He can do all that can be done
1. All power and ability there is to be had is had by God
 2. God needs nothing! He is complete in Himself and borrows nothing from anything or anyone
 - "With God, means are unnecessary. He wills and it is done." Charles Hodge
 3. God cannot, in His omnipotence, be frustrated
 4. God cannot be what He is not!
 5. Questioning, doubting or challenging His omnipotence does not hinder Him
- G. God is Eternal - He is the "Self-Existent One" (Jehovah)
1. God had no beginning because He exists and has being of Himself - all else has being/life from Him
 2. God has always been, always is and always will be without change in His person, personality, might, will, perfection, timelessness, wisdom and knowledge
 - Seeing He is eternal, He cannot change because He is always "is" - "I Am That I Am"
 3. Being eternal and immutable, all of God's attributes will also be eternal and unchangeable
 - His will, then, never changes (His revelation of it is progressive to us)
 4. He is the "ever fixed point" - the truest fixed point of reference in the universe
 5. Time was created and is not an enemy to us - eternity lies ahead of us and is in parallel to us!
- H. God is the essence of Goodness and all that is good and is therefore the definer of what is good
1. There is nothing outside of God that defines what is good
 2. God is the only true "good" one - no other has goodness of themselves!
 3. All His other "moral" attributes are "built" off of this attribute - His holiness, grace and mercy are to be defined in light of His goodness (His rightness in the true ideal)
 - a. Because He is good, He loves (seeing as selflessness is good)
 - b. Because He is good, He has mercy (seeing as withholding wrath from those He loves is good)
 - c. Because He is good, He gives grace (seeing as how enabling power to those He loves is good)
- I. Being good, God is the source of all true love and the love of God is selfless (altruistic)
1. He loves because He chooses to do so and not because He must or needs something from it
 2. As He is unchangeable, His love, once applied, is unchanging as well - He is not fickle
 3. His love is demonstrated in His providing and working in us what is best in contrast to what we may naturally desire and think is best - it is enforced in what is supreme versus what is simply "acceptable"
- J. Being good, God is the source of all true mercy
1. God sees the sinful, helpless state and intervenes first by not sending us straight to an eternal Hell
 2. God is under no external obligation to demonstrate mercy to anyone - the presence of His mercy automatically indicates sin in the recipient (thus the need for mercy) and this is why His mercy is often not deeply stressed
 3. His mercy is one characteristic of Himself that is habitually underrated by its recipients - many view it as either having to be constantly reapplied or as needing some type of effort on our part to receive it
 4. His mercy, in its most basic idea, is His not giving us what we deserve - judgement
 - It is starkly seen in His forgiveness (letting go) of our sin
- K. Being good, God is the source and definer of true grace
1. God, as He chooses, demonstrates undeserved favor to anyone He chooses meeting all His just commands and requirements for "salvation" on their behalf
 - Any undeserved favor He bestows must always be undeserved for it to still be "grace"
 2. He could have just saved us, but because of His graciousness (voluntary favor on the undeserving) He has made us useful, effective and pleasing in His sight - His mercy spares, His grace produces!
 3. It is God making something of nothing! Grace is God's giving joy to those who deserve grief
 4. Grace flows from who God is not from what we can do or by who/what we are - because it is from Him, it always achieves its intended purpose without loss

- L. All that can be defined as “moral” must find their basis in God’s moral attributes - see Micah 6:8
1. Morality is not a randomly defined quality or category nor does it find its authority in subjective interpretation and definition - it is an absolute concept that we are “morally” obligated to search out
 2. Sometimes, living by these revealed truths of who God is will appear to be naive or overly simplistic in the eyes of those around us but better to be those living by set principles firmly founded in who God is than to make brilliant deductions and life calculations based upon available “facts” currently present
- M. God’s greatness cannot be “boxed-in” or effectively measured - Isa. 40
1. God’s greatness in comparison with the greatness of creation makes the creation as if insignificant as to its innate power and size
 2. God’s greatness makes that of the “nations” as if less than nothing
- N. God is a “triune” God - He is three persons in one essence - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - Mt. 28:19; II Cor. 13:14; I Thes. 1:3-5; Eph. 4:4-6; John 1
1. The concept or reality of the trinity would not be known to us apart from the revelation of it from God - it is safe to assume that it is important for us to know
 2. It is also interesting to note that God does not dedicate a portion of Scripture to describe, detail and explain the trinity. It is assumed and discussed without direct explanation
- O. All that has happened and will happen was decreed by God - Eph. 1:1-11, 3:11, Acts 2:23; 4:27-28
1. God’s limitless control to decree, distinguishes Him from all other “gods” - Isa 46:5-11
 2. As mentioned in Acts 15:18, God knows all His works “from the beginning”
 3. Knowing that God is omnipotent, what can there be out from under His control?
 4. Knowing that God is omniscient, He knows all that will happen, so all that does happen is not apart from His knowledge - and, since He has all power, He could have altered what happened
 5. Since God is perfect and righteous, all things that He controls and knows will happen must fall under the jurisdiction of perfection
 6. So, realizing the creator is perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present and is morally flawless in all He thinks, desires and does, we **must** conclude (logically, based upon the facts of our source) that His plan and purposes are absolute
- P. The concepts of Theology have a direct impact on our thinking and our overall perspective of life
1. If God is seen as flawed in any way, we will not fully trust Him or His commands
 2. If God is considered limited, we cannot fully rely upon Him or His word
 3. Faith is only as good, right and strong as its object, which in our case is to be God - if He is seen as omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, good, loving, merciful, gracious and completely sovereign then our faith will be solid and unwavering in light of such an “object”!