

SOTERIOLOGY NOTES

STUDIES IN THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN SALVATION

by Jack L. Arnold, Th.D.

II. The Doctrine of God

- I. Introduction
- II. The Attributes of God
- III. Chart IV

I. Introduction

- a. An understanding of who God is and a sincere contemplation of Him is basic to all Christian thinking. Spurgeon said it this way:

Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of Deity. The proper study of the Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can engage a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the doings, and the existence of the Great God, which he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go on our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumb line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, "I am but of yesterday and know nothing."

- b. The Christian's responsibility is to get to know the God of Scripture and not to conceive of a God of his human imagination. Each Christian needs to be most prayerfully on his guard against devising an image of God in his thoughts that is patterned after his own evil inclinations. Very few today are aware of the awe-inspiring

and worship-provoking grandeur of the Divine Character. Why? Because men do not know the God of Scripture. Martin Luther once said to Erasmus, "Your God is too human." Most Christians have a God who is too small. A true conception of God would have to come by revelation from God, for no man could accurately conceive of the person of God. God has revealed Himself in Scripture and He can only be known as the Holy Spirit illumines one's mind to its meaning.

- c. God is not like a man. His thoughts are not our thoughts and our ways are not His ways. Man must learn that God is not like a human being. Of old the Lord complained, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as thyself" (Psa. 50:21). God is infinitely greater than the best of men. WE MUST ALLOW GOD TO TELL US WHAT HE IS LIKE. WE MUST NOT TELL GOD WHAT WE WOULD LIKE HIM TO BE LIKE!
- d. As it contemplates God, the human mind cannot begin to comprehend Him (Psa. 139:6; 145:3; Job 36:26; 37:5, 23; Rom. 11:33), and it will become overwhelmed with the magnitude of Deity (Job 11:7-9). Yet the fact that the Divine Nature cannot be completely understood does not do away with the Christian's responsibility to prayerfully consider what God has so graciously revealed about Himself in Scripture.

II. **The Attributes of God**

- a. Definition of Attributes: Those characteristics that make up the sum of the person of God. God's attributes are theologically broken up into two classifications, which are:
 - i. Non-communicable Attributes: Those attributes that are inherent only to God and cannot be experienced by any of God's creatures such as omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience.
 - ii. Communicable Attributes: Those attributes that are part of God's nature but which to some degree can be experienced or realized in God's creatures.
 - iii. Non-communicable Attributes
 - 1. Omnipotence (All-powerful): God is the first cause or the prime mover of everything that transpires, except sin, and He Himself is never held responsible for the sins of men (I Chron. 29:11, 12; II Chron. 20:6; Job 23:13; 42:3; Psa. 115:3; Prov. 19:21; Dan. 4:35; Isa. 46:10; Eph. 1:11). God is absolutely free to will and is

able to do all that He wills to do. Arthur Pink said:....
Men imagine that the Most High is moved by sentiment, rather than actuated by principle. They suppose that His omni potency is such an idle fiction that Satan is thwarting His designs on every side. They think that if He has formed any plan or purpose at all, then it must be like theirs, constantly subject to change. They openly declare that whatever power He possesses must be restricted, lest He invade the citadel of man's "free will" and reduce him to a "machine." They lower all efficacious atonement, which actually redeemed everyone for whom it was made, to merely a "remedy" which sin- sick souls may use if they feel disposed to; and they enervate the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an "offer" of the Gospel that sinners may accept or reject as they please. The "god" of this twentieth century no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The "god" who is now talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible conferences is the figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside of the pale of Christendom form "gods" out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside of Christendom manufacture a "god" out of their own carnal mind. In reality they are but atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A "god" whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object of worship, merits naught but contempt.

2. Omniscience (All-knowing): God has knowledge of all things actual and possible. God knows everything—all events and all creatures of the past, the present and the future. He is perfectly acquainted with every detail in the life of every being in Heaven, on earth and in hell (Rev. 4:13; Psa. 139:2-4; Ezk. 11:5; Acts 15:18; Jer. 17:10; Job 23:10, Psa. 103:14; 139:23, 24; 147:5; 33:13). God's knowledge of the future is as complete as is His knowledge of the past and the present, and that, because the future depends entirely upon

Himself. Were it in any way possible for something to occur apart from either direct agency or permission of God, that something would be independent of Him, and He would at once cease to be Supreme. God had knowledge of an infinite number of plans and the one He chose is the one that brings the most glory to Himself. Based on His sovereign will, God put into motion His plan and on the basis of His initial decision, He has knowledge and certainty of all future events. God cannot be sure of anything until He has willed it--a decision must be made before there is certainty. Knowledge of future events is based on God's original plan.

3. Omnipresence (Everywhere Present): Because God is spirit (Jn. 4:24), He is everywhere at once (Eph. 4:6; Jer. 23:24). "Though God extends beyond creation's rim, the smallest atom holds the whole of Him."
4. Immutability (Unchanging): God is perpetually the same and subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations (Mal. 3:6; Psa. 102:24; Jas. 1:17). There never was a time when God was not; there never will come a time when He shall cease to be. God has neither evolved, grown, nor improved. All that He is today, He has ever been and ever will be. POINT: One of two things causes a person to change his mind and reverse his plans—want of foresight to anticipate everything, or lack of power to execute them. But as God is both omniscient and omnipotent there is never any need for Him to revise His plan.
5. Eternal: God is eternal in that He has always existed. He existed before there was time because He is the Author of time (Psa. 90:2; Ex. 3:14).
6. Sovereign: Absolute authority and control over anything or anyone with no limitations (Isa. 46:10; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11; Psa. 115:3; 135:6). Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of Heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent, God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, and always as He pleases. None can thwart Him and none can hinder Him.
7. Infinity and Solitariness: There was a time in eternity past when God was alone, subsisting in the three persons of the Trinity. God was self-sustaining,

needing nothing and no one. Pink says:

During a past eternity, God was alone: self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied, in need of nothing. Had a universe, had angels, had human beings been necessary to Him in any way, they also would have been called into existence from all eternity. The creating of them when He did, added nothing to God essentially. He changes not (Mal. 3:6), therefore His essential glory can be neither augmented nor diminished. God was under no constraint, no obligation, no necessity to create. That He chose to do so was purely a sovereign act on His part, caused by nothing outside Himself, determined by nothing but His own mere good pleasure: for He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). That He did create was simply for His manifestative glory.

POINT: There was never any lack in the person of God. He was complete before any creative activity. In creating He gains nothing from His creatures. He did not have to create things or men and did not have to save anyone. If he did so it was for His own good pleasure and for His own glory.

8. Light: God is perfect and pure (1 Jn. 1:5). Light is closely related to holiness. "God is light" means that He is the sum of all excellence.
9. Glory: The sum of all God's attributes equals God's glory. All that God is results in His glory (Jn. 17:5, 24).

iv. Communicable Attributes

1. Life: God is life. Apart from Him there is no physical or eternal life. He is the fountainhead of all life (Jn. 5:26, Acts 17:28).
2. Holiness: God is independently, infinitely, and immutably separate from all sin and is absolute purity, untouched by the marks of sin. He is the Holy One (Rev. 15:4; Ex. 15:11; Isa. 6:3; Psa. 99:5). A special emphasis is placed upon this perfection of God; He is more often called holy than almighty in Scripture. Because God is Holy, He hates sin. Sin is contrary to His nature (Prov. 3:32; 15:26; Nah. 1:2; Psa. 5:5, 7:11).

3. Justice: God is just. He is the righteous judge of the highest court. From Him comes perfect justice. Therefore, because God is holy and hates all sin, He must judge sin. If He does not judge sin, then He is not just and thus not God (Rom. 3:26; Deut. 32:4).
4. Goodness or Benevolence: God is originally good, good of Himself, which nothing else is; for all creatures are good only by participation with and communication from God. He is essentially good, not only good, but goodness itself (Gen. 1:31; Psa. 145:15; 136:25; 33:5; 107:8; Nah. 1:7).
5. Truth: God is inherently truthful so that whatever He says or does is based on truth and can be accepted as absolute truth (Jn. 7:28).
6. Love: It is not simply that God "loves," but that He is love itself. God's very nature is love and His eternal plan is based on love (Deut. 7:7, 8; 11 Tim. 1:9, Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:19; Jer. 31:3; Eph. 3:4; 1:4, 5; 3:19; Jn. 13:1; Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5; Heb. 12:6; Rom. 8:32-39). The cause of God's love lies in Himself; thus He loves whom He pleases.
7. Righteousness: God is inherently righteous (Deut. 32:4); therefore all that He does is right (Psa. 145:17; 33:4, 5; Gen. 18:25; Isa. 45:19).

b. Points To Ponder

- i. God existed before His plan. The plan He set forth was based on His very nature; therefore whatever He did in His plan was right.
- ii. When God set forth the plan in eternity past, all His attributes worked together. None worked before or after another. All attributes worked simultaneously to initiate God's creation and creatures. The plan that God set forth brings the most glory to Himself. By His omniscience, God had access to an infinite number of plans, and the power to make whatever he chose come to pass, but the one He chose brought the most glory to Himself.

CHART IV: God and His Attributes

<i>Non-Communicable Attributes</i>	<i>Communicable Attributes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Omnipotence ○ Omniscient ○ Immutability ○ Eternal ○ Infinity and Solitary ○ Sovereign ○ Light 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Life ○ Holiness ○ Justice ○ Goodness ○ Truth ○ Love ○ Righteousness ○ Glory
Psa. 145:17; Gen. 18:25	Deut. 32:4; Psa. 33:4, 5
<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>GOD</p> <pre> graph TD GOD --> Faithfulness GOD --> Wrath GOD --> Mercy GOD --> Grace GOD --> Patience GOD --> Sovereignty Mercy --> DECREE </pre> <p>Faithfulness Wrath Mercy Grace Patience Sovereignty</p> <p>DECREE</p> </div>	