

CHAPTER X

THE INFINITY OF GOD

A. INTRODUCTION

1. It may seem presumptuous for finite man even to attempt to ponder the infinite, and especially when he frequently makes such a fool of himself in his futile attempts to discover God as well as his carnal pursuit of the spiritual.
 - a. Tozer points out the difficulty as follows:

Of all that can be thought and said about God, His infinitude is the most difficult to grasp. Even to try to conceive of it would appear to be self-contradictory, for such conceptualization requires us to undertake something which we know at the outset we can never accomplish. Yet we must try, for the Holy Scriptures teach that God is infinite and, if we accept His other attributes, we must of necessity accept this one too.¹
 - b. On the other hand, if the infinite Creator, who has made finite man, should deign to reach down from His eternal and glorious throne to frail flesh, then such condescension is characteristic of the goodness of God. “The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up” (Ex. 19:20). “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).
 - c. Thus the glorious truth is that in the incarnate Son of God and his reconciling work, a bridge has been established before man which enables the finite creature and the infinite God to have personal discourse and true fellowship, for man with temporal life to enter into eternal life, for material earth to be reached by the highest heaven. “⁵For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,” (I Tim. 2:5; cf. John 1:51).
2. From the perspective of man as a fallen creature, his frustration at this point arises not so much from his inability to comprehend God’s infinity as his reluctance to accept his own finiteness. Proud man, so arrogant, especially in the light of his flaunted learning and achievements, is reluctant to confess that he has limitations, that his finiteness is so obvious in the light of his life being but a fleeting shadow.

¹ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pp. 9-50.

- a. *Finiteness* means to be bounded, limited, restricted, having an end, and man with his sinful constitution, has great difficulty in accepting this truth concerning himself. He speaks as though he were immortal. Specifically, he is finite in the following areas:
- (1) *Motion*: he is limited by his physical constitution. He cannot fly, or swim long distances, or stay awake indefinitely, or lift great weights.
 - (2) *Time*: he is limited to temporal rather than everlasting ideas. He has about seventy years to live and thinks in sequence rather than eternal categories.
 - (3) *Existence*: he is limited in being dependent, mortal. He is not self-originating, self-supporting, self-perpetuating. He is born to degenerate.
 - (4) *Personality*: he is limited on account of an inherited gene matrix. A person's DNA has the encoding that establishes distinctive personal characteristics.
 - (5) *Presence*: he is limited in relation to location in space. He cannot be in two separate places at once because of material limitation.
 - (6) *Knowledge*: he is restricted according to cerebral design, inherited traits, capacity, accumulated knowledge, and reasoning ability.
- b. *Inifiniteness* means to be unbounded, unlimited, unrestricted, without end, inexhaustible, beyond, and man with his sinful, proud nature has great difficulty in acknowledging his mere finite grasp of the infinite. ⁷ Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? ⁸ They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?" (Job 11:7-8).
- (1) Perpetual motion would transport man into the realm of the infinite, yet it remains as elusive as ever. According to entropy within the Second Law of Thermodynamics, order in the world descends into randomness through the unavailability of previously available energy. Man, desiring immortality, finds mortality and dissolution inescapable.
 - (2) Man's probing of space has hardly scratched the surface, for back of the beyond reveals a mind-boggling, seemingly limitless universe that defies human comprehension. While we speak of millions of light years, yet this verbal definition transcends real comprehension of such immensity. Certainly any attempt here only increases man's sense of his minuteness.

- (3) However, the Bible reveals that man can only come to grips with his limitations and finiteness when he humbly yields to the infiniteness of the eternal God. ⁴ He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them. ⁵ Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147: 4-5; cf. Isa. 40:28-29).
- c. By way of illustration, the limits of man's understanding are best appreciated when it is realized that he cannot fully comprehend concepts of either the finite or the infinite. Consider that if we were told outer space ended at a distance beyond us of one thousand light years, we would refuse to believe it. Instead we would desire to investigate this "end" of space and "explore beyond," so to speak. On the other hand, if we were told that space was eternal, limitless, we would just as strenuously declare that it must eventually come to an end somewhere! Hence, as with the sovereignty of God, so the infinity of God requires submission rather than understanding.
3. Defining the infinity of God.
- a. God is unlimited, unbounded, unconfined, unsearchable, immeasurable, beyond ultimate comprehension. ⁷ Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? ⁸ They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? ⁹ Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea." (Job 11:7-9; cf. I Kings 8:27; Job 5:8-9; 9:10; Isa. 40:28; Rom. 11:33).
- (1) Yet God is not limitless by nature for there are the fixed bounds, the fullness of His own essential being. Hence, Strong explains: "Infinity implies simply that God exists in no necessary relation to finite things or beings, and that whatever limitation of the divine nature results from their existence is, on the part of God, a self-limitation."²
- (2) In Psalm 145:3, David declares that "His [the LORD'S] greatness is unsearchable," beyond man's reach through exploration. But this infinite greatness is within the bounds of a glorious array of unchanging attributes in vs. 4-13 of this same Psalm. ⁴ One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. ⁵ On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate. ⁶ Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, and I will tell of Your greatness. ⁷ They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness and will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. ⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. ⁹ The LORD is good to all, and

² "Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 255.

His mercies are over all His works. ¹⁰ All Your works shall give thanks to You, O LORD, and Your godly ones shall bless You. ¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power; ¹² to make known to the sons of men Your mighty acts and the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom. ¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations." Thus the transcendent nature of God gives David good reason to respond with joyful praise and worship rather than dissatisfaction and despair, vs. 2-4, 7. So Isaac Watts has written:

Great God! How infinite art Thou!
 What worthless worms are we!
 Let the whole race of creatures bow,
 And pay their praise to Thee!

Thy throne eternal ages stood,
 Ere seas or stars were made;
 Thou art the ever-living God,
 Long after empires fade.

All time and nature open lie
 To Thine immense survey,
 From the formation of the sky,
 To the great burning Day.

Eternity, with all its years,
 Stands present in Thy view;
 To Thee there's nothing new appears-
 And Lord, there's nothing new!

Our lives through various scenes are drawn,
 And vexed with trifling cares,
 While Thine eternal will moves on
 Unchanging through the years.

Great God! How infinite art Thou!
 What worthless worms are we!
 Let the whole race of creatures bow,
 And pay their praise to Thee!

Also consider that God is "unsearchable" in the realm of His wonders (Job 5:9; 9:10) and His understanding. "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable" (Isa. 40:28).

- b. God is infinite in all of His nature. This infinity includes the three persons of the triune God. Of special mention here ought to be the infinity of God the Son who, in becoming clothed with finite flesh in a finite world, at the same time became the bridge between the finite and the infinite; through him, man possessing

temporal life is able to become the recipient of eternal life; through him the material attains spirituality. Hence, because of man's temporal, spatial, material, moral relationship with this finite present world, particular aspects of God's infinite being are worthy of subsequent special study. They are listed as follows

God is perfect	⇒	Infinity of morality
God is omnipotent	⇒	Infinity of power
God is eternal	⇒	Infinity of time
God is omniscient	⇒	Infinity of knowledge
God is omniscient	⇒	Infinity of wisdom
God is omnipresent	⇒	Infinity within space
God is immense	⇒	Infinity beyond space
God is immanent	⇒	Infinity within creation
God is transcendent	⇒	Infinity beyond creation

B. GOD IS PERFECT - INFINITE IN MORALITY

1. In a broad sense, every aspect of God's being is "perfect." that is "complete" or "absolutely pure" or "unblemished." It is for this reason that God's attributes are frequently called "perfections."
 - a. Hence, John Owen declares that, "He [God] is *absolutely* perfect, inasmuch as no perfection is wanting [lacking] to Him, and *comparatively* above all that we can conceive or apprehend of perfection."³
 - b. However, God is not merely the perfect extension of our own imperfections, or an advanced projection of our incompleteness, as earlier rationalism has maintained.⁴ This rationalist conception is based upon a world view that is materialist, having undetermined randomness that results in both dissolution and the survival of the fittest, not the hope of a perfect, objective moral order. Rather, God is the eternal fullness of deity, being perfect at the beginning (Gen. 1:1), whose nature is constantly and impeccably holy.
2. Yet the perfection of God more often refers to specific moral or ethical aspects of His person. He is perfect in holiness and righteousness.

³ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, XII, p. 95.

⁴ "The mass of Rationalists said, . . . that instead of God making man after his image, man had made God after his human image." John F. Hurst, *History of Rationalism*, p. 200.

- a. Strong makes this distinction as follows: "By perfection we mean, not mere quantitative completeness, but qualitative excellence. The attributes involved in perfection are moral attributes."⁵
- b. Hence, the Bible emphasizes the moral perfection, the holy completeness and excellence of God, in contrast with imperfect, incomplete, dishonorable man, according to the following aspects.
- (1) God is perfect in justice. "The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He" (Deut. 32:4). In other words, God's righteous dealings with man are unfailingly equitable. His judgments are rocklike, that is immovable. His movements are always and absolutely right.
 - (2) God is perfect in love. "⁴³ You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:43-48). In other words, God's love transcends mere human, selective regard for the attractive and satisfying. Rather, He loves His enemies; He loves the unlovely; He loves profoundly; He loves with integrity; He loves perfectly.
 - (3) God is perfect in the goodness of His will. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). Murray comments: "The will of God is the transcript of his holiness, justice, and goodness. When we are commanded to be perfect as God is perfect (cf. Matt. 5:48), the will of God as revealed to us in his Word is in complete correspondence with the pattern described, namely 'As your heavenly Father is perfect'".⁶
- c. Surprisingly, the Bible expects believers to reflect God's perfection. Of course this completeness and excellence is with regard to the original stature that innocent man embodied, and at the same time is superior in Christ.

⁴ Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 260.

⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II, pp. 115-6.

- (1) In Deuteronomy 32:3-5, God's children are to dispense perfect justice. "3 For I proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! 4 The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He. 5 They have acted corruptly toward Him, they are not His children, because of their defect; but are a perverse and crooked generation."

- (2) In Matthew 5: 48, God's children are to manifest perfect love. "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." John Wesley comments that Christ "well knew how ready our unbelief would be to cry out, 'This is impossible!' and therefore stakes upon it all the power, truth, and faithfulness of Him to whom all things are possible."⁷ Nevertheless, as the beatitudes indicate (Mat. 5:3-12), the pursuit of sinless perfection in this life is not Christ's intent. So Hendriksen explains: "In the present connection, however, 'perfect' [τέλειος, teleios] means 'brought to completion, full grown, lacking nothing.' . . . it is the Father's *perfection* that we should strive to imitate; that is, perfection here specifically (as the preceding context indicates) in the love he shows to all."⁸

- (3) In Romans 12:2, God's children are to reflect His perfect will. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

C. GOD IS OMNIPOTENT - INFINITE IN POWER

1. By definition, God's omnipotence is His absolute power that is the source of all causation, efficiency, activity, and growth, channeled through either primary or secondary means. "Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God" (Ps. 62:11). "Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You" (Jer. 32:17; cf. Ps 89:13; 115:3; Luke 1:37; Rom. 1:20). As previously considered, the omnipotence of God is the dynamic of His dominion and sovereignty.
 - a. Perhaps the earliest patriarchal name for God was "El Shaddai," or "God Almighty." "Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless.'" (Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3; Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 19:6).

⁷ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon The New Testament*, I.

⁸ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 317.

- b. Omnipotence is boundless power that has only the confines of God's holy and immutable nature. It is closely related to, yet distinct from, the life and personal energy of God. He alone is the ultimate source and fullness of potency, dynamic, force, might.
- (1) Charnock comments: "God were not omnipotent unless his power were infinite; for a finite power is a limited power, and a limited power cannot effect everything that is possible. Nothing can be too difficult for the divine power to effect. He hath a fullness of power, an exceeding strength, above all human capacities; it is a mighty power (Eph. 1:19)."⁹
 - (2) God's power is limited only by the absurd and the self-contradictory, such as the question as whether God is capable of creating a rock too big for Him to carry. However this is to foolishly, impossibly pit God against God. He cannot uphold a logical absurdity according to divine logic, such as immoral virtue, or self-destruct, or oppose one attribute with another
- c. Omnipotence is also to be understood as both absolute and ordinate, including that which is potential as well as active.
- (1) God's absolute or potential power includes activity that could accomplish what is possible and yet not be ordained. "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?" (Jer. 32:27; cf. Gen. 18:14; Matt. 3:9; 26:53).
 - (2) God's actual or ordinate power includes activity that will accomplish that which is ordained. "⁹ Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; ¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it" (Isa. 46:9-11).
- d. Omnipotence includes the boundless power of God manifest in the realms of matter, creation, man, angels, earth, soul, spirit, heaven, and hell. The power of God is evident in physics and chemistry, in the micro and the macro, as well as in non-material, eternal realities.
- e. Omnipotence is always to be understood in conjunction with God's moral attributes. Charnock explains:

⁹ Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, II, p. 111.

The power of God is that ability and strength whereby he can bring to pass whatsoever he please, whatsoever his infinite wisdom can direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of his will can resolve. . . . as holiness is the beauty, so power is the life of all his attributes in their exercise; and as holiness, so power is an adjunct belonging to all, a term that may be given to all. God hath a powerful wisdom to attain his ends, without interruption. He hath a powerful mercy to remove our misery; a powerful justice to lay all misery upon offenders; he hath a powerful truth to perform his promises; an infinite power to bestow rewards and inflict penalties. So in Psalm 62:11-12, David declares two related things, first, 'that power belongs to God,' and second, that 'lovingkindness is Thine, O LORD, for Thou dost recompense a man according to his works.' In every perfection of God David heard of power.¹⁰

- f. Omnipotence is evident in the triunity of God, that is in:
- (1) The omnipotence of the Father. ¹⁸ "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:18-20; cf. Mark 14:36; Rev. 21:22).
 - (2) The omnipotence of the Son. ²⁶ "He said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?' Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. ²⁷ The men were amazed, and said, 'What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?'" (Matt. 8:26-27; cf. Rom. 1:4; Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 1:15-17).
 - (3) The omnipotence of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." (Job 33:4; Ps. 104:30; Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:13; I Pet. 3:18).
- g. Omnipotence is manifest in various aspects of God's administration.
- (1) Creation. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made" (Rom. 1:20; cf. Neh. 9:6; Ps. 89:11-13; Rom. 1:20).

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 106, 108.

- (2) Preservation. ²⁰ You appoint darkness and it becomes night, in which all the beasts of the forest prowl about. ²¹ The young lions roar after their prey and seek their food from God" (Ps. 104:20-21; cf. Ps. 36:6; Ps. 104:25-28; 145:15-16; Heb. 1:3).
 - (3) Redemption. ¹⁸ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (I Cor. 1:18, 22-24; cf. Rom. 1:16; II Cor. 13:4).
 - (4) Judgment. ¹⁴ The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'" (Rev. 6:14-17; cf. Rom. 9:22; Heb. 12:29; Rev. 20:11-15).
 - (5) Government. ¹⁵ Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust. ¹⁶ Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering. ¹⁷ All the nations are as nothing before Him, they are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless" (Isa. 40:15-17; cf. Rom. 13:1; Rev. 11:15; 21:1-3).
2. The practical consequences of learning about God's omnipotence. There is first perception of the power of God through spiritual eyes, then spiritual appropriation of the power of God in the outworking of the gospel, then worship with wonder at the outworking of the power of God, that is concerning His mighty doings, but also His power working in small things. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). So these practical consequences also include:
- a. According to Charnock, with regard to the unbelieving world and various forms of paganism, there is common belief that one god is incapable of managing the affairs of this universe. This is a great insult to the omnipotence of Jehovah.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 174-82.

- (1) It is a source of contempt, in a variety of ways, especially by means of unbelief in His potency, as well as the whole realm of godless living.
 - (a) *Obstinacy in sin challenges God's power.* "When men are not concerned at divine threatening, nor staggered in their sinful race, they intimate that the declarations of divine power are but vain-glorious boastings."
 - (b) *Distrust of God's truth challenges God's power.* "All distrust is founded in a doubting of his truth, as if he would not be as good as his word; or of his power, as if he could not be as great as his word. We measure the infinite power of God by the short line of our understandings."
 - (c) *Fear of man's power challenges God's power.* "Fear of man is a crediting the might of man a disrepute of the arm of God; it takes away the glory of his might, and renders the creature stronger than God, and God more feeble than mortal [man]."
 - (d) *Self-confidence challenges God's power.* "It is 'not I,' saith Paul, that labor, 'but the grace,' the efficacious grace, 'of God which is in me.' Whatsoever good we do is from him, not from ourselves; to ascribe it to ourselves, or to instruments, is to overlook and contemn his power."
 - (e) *Unbelief of the gospel challenges God's power.* "This perfection [of omnipotence] hath been discovered in the conception of Christ, the union of the two natures [deity and flesh], his resurrection from the grave, the restoration of the world, and the conversion of men, more than in the creation of the world."
- (2) It is a source of abuse.
 - (a) "We abuse this power when we believe every idle story that is reported, because God is able to make it so if he pleased. We may as well believe Æsop's fables to be true, that birds spake and beasts reasoned, because the power of God can enable such creatures to such acts."
 - (b) "When men sit with folded arms, and make a confidence in his power of glorious title to their idleness and disobedience, they would have his strength do all, and his precept should move them to do nothing; this is a trust of his power against his command, a pretended glorifying his power with a slight of his sovereignty."

- (3) It is a source of comfort.
- (a) *In affliction and distress.* "My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:2).
 - (b) *In temptation and conflict.* "¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." (Eph. 6:10-11).
 - (c) *In the certain fulfillment of God's promises.* "For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?" (Isa. 14:27).
 - (d) *In the encouragement of perseverance and security.* "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand." (John 10:29).
- b. According to Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards and president of Yale College:¹²
- (1) The omnipotence of God means that He is absolutely independent and self-sustaining. Because He does not lack power, his purposes cannot be opposed or disappointed.
 - (2) God is best qualified to govern the universe. Hence, He upholds his dignity by being able to supply all needed energy so far as to quash his enemies and preserve his subjects.
 - (3) God is an inescapable terror to those who oppose him since He replies with the power by which the heavens were formed. Against this, none can finally prevail.
 - (4) God is a stalwart friend to the righteous since his omnipotence guarantees the bestowal of all good things upon them according to the riches of his grace.
 - (5) God is consequently almighty and glorious, "in the deluge, the destruction of Sodom, the wonders of Egypt, of Sinai, and of Canaan; in the miracles of the prophets of Christ, and of the apostles, as cannot fail to astonish every mind."

¹² Timothy Dwight, *Dwight's Theology*, pp. 37-40.

- c. According to C. H. Spurgeon. Consider his sermon titled "The Mighty Arm," based upon Psalm 89:13. "You have a strong arm; Your hand is mighty, Your right hand is exalted."¹³ He concludes that:
- (1) If God be so strong, then resist no longer and yield to Him. "Man, do you hope to resist God? Hast thou an arm like God's, and canst thou thunder with a voice like his? Throw down those weapons, and cease to wage a hopeless war. Capitulate at once, surrender at discretion. Oh, if there be a man here who is the enemy of God, I beseech him to count the cost."
 - (2) If God be so strong, then trust Him to save you. "I have shown you that he [God] has treasured up his gracious power in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, therefore look unto Jesus Christ and be ye saved. All power lies with him, he can forgive all sin, and he can also subdue all iniquity, change the most depraved heart, and implant every grace in the soul."
 - (3) If God be so strong, then trust Him to deliver from everything. "You that are his people, never dare to distrust him. Is his arm shortened? Cannot the Lord deliver you? Bring your burdens, your troubles, your wants, your griefs, pour them out like water before him, let them flow forth at the foot of the Almighty, and they shall pass away."
 - (4) If God be so strong, then shake off all fear of mortal man. "Who art thou that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die? Man is but grass, withered in an hour, wherefore should you tremble at his frown? He is crushed before the moth; why then fear him? Let not the faces of proud men confound you."
 - (5) If God be so strong, then think no longer of personal weakness. "Art thou weak as water? Then rejoice this day, and glory in infirmity, because the power of God shall rest upon thee. Think not of what thou canst do—that is a very small affair, but consider what he can do by thee. He can strengthen the feeble against the strong."
 - (6) If God be so strong, then commit the future into His hands. "You have a great trouble to face tomorrow, you are expecting a greater trouble still at the end of the week. Now, be not afraid, for the Lord liveth to deliver thee. . . . In patience and quietness wait for the fulfillment of his promise: rest in him and be at peace. Stand thou still, and see the salvation of God."

¹³ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, XXII, pp. 526-7.

3. The operation of God's omnipotence is directed towards man in a twofold manner. "17 Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You, 18 who shows lovingkindness to thousands, but repays the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their children after them, O great and mighty God. The LORD of hosts is His name; 19 great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jer. 32:17-19).

a. God's power is directed toward the *unrighteous*.

- (1) It is his power of which they are ignorant. "But Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God'" (Matt. 22:29).
- (2) It is his power which they yet reflect. "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.'" (Rom. 9:17; cf. Exod. 9:13-17).
- (3) It is his power in wrath. "For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, 'The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him.'" (Ezra 8:22; cf. Rev. 6:14-17).
- (4) It is his power in judgment. "6 For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." (II Thess. 1:6-8; cf. Rev. 16:7-9; 18:8).

b. God's power is directed toward the *righteous*.

- (1) It is his power of salvation. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Rom. 1:16; cf. Deut. 4:37; Eph. 1:19).
- (2) It is his power poured out upon his people. "O God, You are awesome from Your sanctuary. The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the people. Blessed be God!" (Ps. 68:35; cf. Isa. 40:29-31; Eph. 3:20; Col. 1:10-11; I Pet. 1:5; II Pet. 1:3).

- (3) It is his power distributed for ministry. “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (Eph. 6:10).
- (a) Directed towards God’s people. “On the other hand I am filled with power—with the Spirit of the LORD—and with justice and courage to make known to Jacob his rebellious act, even to Israel his sin” (Mic. 3:8; cf. Heb. 4:11-12).
- (b) Directed towards the world. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8; cf. I Cor. 1:24; 2:4-5).
- (4) It is his power of resurrection. “¹⁴Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.” (I Cor. 6:14).

D. GOD IS ETERNAL - INFINITE IN TIME

1. While it is common for God to be defined, in relation to time, as being eternal and thus without beginning or end in a linear sense, yet it would be better to say that He is before time, above time, and beyond time. “¹¹ My days are like a lengthened shadow, and I wither away like grass. ¹² But You, O LORD, abide forever, and Your name to all generations. . . . ²⁷ But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end. ²⁸ The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You.” (Ps. 102:11-12, 27-28; cf. Deut. 33:27; Is. 40:28; I Tim. 1:17).
 - a. God does not simply inhabit limitless time, rather He transcends time. Although God has entered time (Gal. 4:4), yet time has originated with God so that He is not limited or regulated by a temporal scheme of things. “¹² Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, ‘O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Aijalon.’ ¹³ So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies. Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day” (Josh. 10:12-13).
 - b. Charnock explains:

The Spirit of God in Scripture condescends to our capacities in signifying the eternity of God by days and years, which are terms belonging to time, whereby we measure it (Ps. 102:27); but we must no more conceive that God is bounded or measured by time, and hath succession of days because of those expressions, than

we can conclude him to have a body because members are ascribed to him in Scripture, to help our conceptions of his glorious nature and operations.¹⁴

2. God in His essential nature is eternal. This term describes Him as transcending time, as does the Creator transcend His creation, as does spirit transcend matter, as does His vision transcend the narrow vision of man.

Charnock adds:

God is his own eternity. He is not eternal by grant, and the disposal of any other, but by nature and essence. The eternity of God is nothing else but the duration of God, and the duration of God is nothing else but his existence enduring. . . . Hence, all the perfections of God are eternal. In regard of the divine eternity, all things in God are eternal; his power, mercy, wisdom, justice, knowledge. God himself were not eternal if any of his perfections, which are essential to him, were not eternal also; he had not else been a perfect God from all eternity, and so his whole self had not been eternal.¹⁵

- a. God is eternal in His triune existence as revealed in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 - (1) God the Father is eternal. "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable." (Isa. 40:28; cf. 57:15).
 - (2) God the Son is eternal. "'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'" (Rev. 1:8; cf. John 1:1; Col. 1:17; Heb. 13:8).
 - (3) God the Holy Spirit is eternal. "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:14).
- b. God is eternal in His personal covenant name. As Jehovah/Yahweh, He is uniquely "I AM WHO I AM" "¹³ Then Moses said to God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?'" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM ' ; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"' (Ex. 3:13-15).

¹⁴ Charnock, *Works*, I, p. 354.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 353-4.

- (1) Charnock describes this title as follows: "I AM is his proper name. This description being in the present tense, shows that his essence knows no past nor future. If it were *he was*, it would intimate he were not now what he once was; if it were *he will be*, it would intimate he were not yet what he will be ; but *I am*; I am the only being, the root of all beings; he is therefore at the greatest distance from not being, and that it eternal."¹⁶
 - (2) Thus in Genesis 21:33, "Abraham "called on the name of the LORD [Jehovah], the Everlasting God [El Olam]."
- c. What then would we conclude if God was known not to be eternal? Charnock explains:¹⁷
- (1) God would not be self-existent, and thus be disqualified as deity. God could not have been non-existent in the past and then come to have existence through another or self-generation.
 - (2) God would not be immutable in that He would have passed from non-being to being, from nothing to something.
 - (3) God would not be infinitely perfect since He would have known searchable limitation and moral bounds.
 - (4) God would not be omnipotent and almighty because He would have been absolutely impotent in non-being. He would have had no sovereignty in non-existence.
 - (5) God would not be the first cause of all. In this case, to have being after non-being would require a prior cause, so that this being would be derived rather than original.
3. The nature of time and eternity from the perspective of man and God.
- a. According to Carl Henry, the definition of time "is one of the most vexing problems in philosophy."¹⁸ This would be especially so if our thinking was humanistic and thus excluded the contrasting thought of eternity. Time is to be understood as a relationship rather than a substance. That is, time involves a perceived sequence of events rather than a material quality. As such we tend to comprehend this order in a linear sense rather than a circle. Herman Bavinck

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 355.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 356-8.

¹⁸ Everett F. Harison, ed., Carl F. Henry, "Time," *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, p. 523.

states that, “the essence of time is not that it is without beginning or end but that it contains a succession of moments; that is past, present, or future. From this it follows that time—intrinsic time—is a mode of existence of all created and finite things.”¹⁹ Even so, when those moments are identified as birth, life and death, then past present and future are most significant expressions. God originated time so that the creation we inhabit exists in time, yet He his design never envisaged separation from the eternal since He, in having fellowship with His creation in time, yet remains eternal beyond time.

- b. Time involves the succession, that is the order of events that make up the panorama of our earthly existence. It is understood in much the same way that we think of speed. In a jet plane at high altitude, being distant from objects, speed is hardly noticed. But at low altitude the opposite is the case as we relate our movement to other nearby objects visible on the ground. Time involves perspective or sequential comprehension. While we agree that time comprises an order of events, yet it also requires a certain understanding or perception of that order. It is especially true in this realm regarding the great difference that exists between man’s comprehension of time and that of the eternal God.
- (1) Man comprehends time in terms of consecutive events according to order or succession. It is as if man’s mental limits necessitate this restricted level of perception. He simply cannot perceive all events in the now. Man, unlike God, comprehends time as truth that comes piece by piece, frame by frame, as death follows life and night follows day. Whereas for God, “¹¹ if I say, ‘Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night, ¹² even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You’” (Ps. 139:11-12).
 - (2) God comprehends all events, even if logically, yet instantaneously, that is in the eternal now (Isa. 57:15). Thus God never ages since His existence is measureless. God comprehends time as a totally comprehensive embrace of reality and truth that is always in the present or now dimension. “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.’” (John 8:58).
 - (3) Hence man is not to put God in a time box of limitation since with Him “a thousand years [is] like one day (II Pet. 3:8). However God, in the person of His beloved eternal Son, has entered a spatial, material, temporal world and yielded Himself to its limitations. Even so, this same Son was always desirous of returning to that eternal realm. “⁵ Now, Father, glorify Me

¹⁹ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 156.

- (4) together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5; cf. 1:18; 7:33; 17:11, 13).
- c. By way of illustration, William Shedd well pictures both aspects of successive events and panoramic perspective as follows. Imagine a person in the foyer of a tall, eighty storey building observing the procession of individual people and automobiles as they pass by the main door sequentially, one by one. By contrast, imagine the all-inclusive, relatively instant perspective of a person watching that same scene from the top of that same tall building.²⁰ Hence, while time suits man's limited mode of comprehension, yet comprehensive perception in the eternal dimension suits God's infinite mode of existence.
4. The practical importance of temporal man knowing the eternal God.

Two factors especially impinge upon our appreciation of time. First there is the fact that man is living and indeed he loves life more than death. Yet being alive is on a continuum, and time connects us with inevitable death, seemingly a conclusion to time in this present economy, so that there is no real rest in the present as time relentlessly marches us on towards our inevitable demise. Second there is man's problem with sin, and resultant carnality, that not only extinguishes life, but also corrupts and frustrates his participation in time.

- a. Charnock offers the following practical applications.²¹
- (1) God's eternity ought to make us soberly consider our sin. For while man quickly brushes aside his evil into the past, God perceives all of that wickedness in the eternal now!
 - (2) God's eternity deflates man's pride since he comes to realize just how limited is his temporal nature. His existence is but for a fleeting moment, a mere transitory blink.
 - (3) God's eternity should cause us to take our love away from the transient world and direct it toward the everlasting God. We should live with eternities' values in mind.
 - (4) God's eternity ought to stimulate us to worship His greatness and enjoy endless communion. This would be enhanced by means of learning from the incarnate Son's relationship with His eternal Father.

²⁰ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, I, pp. 344-45.

²¹ Charnock, *Works*, I, pp. 367-73.

- (5) God's eternity ought to encourage us to serve Him with the excellence of service that His timeless majesty deserves. We should invest in spiritual values by means of the impartation of eternal life.
- b. Concerning man's present existence as part of a thoroughly corrupt human race, time is an inescapable tyrant since:

Time like an ever-rolling stream,
 Bear's all its sons away;
 They fly forgotten, as a dream
 Dies at the opening day.

Time is frustrating since we never seem to have enough hours in a day; how common it is to hear, "If only I had more time." Yet when we seem to have years of it ahead of us, especially in youth, then we presume upon it and find that it passes almost unnoticed like sand running through our fingers. Suddenly we realize that we don't really have much time left. The older we get the more we attempt to bargain for smaller amounts. Such was the plea of King Hezekiah who, being mortally ill, pleaded with God for a further fifteen years (II Kings 20:1-11). Nevertheless, good king that he was, during those fifteen years Hezekiah acted foolishly by displaying his wealth to a Babylonian delegation. Therefore God revealed, through Isaiah, that this wealth would be taken as spoil to Babylon (II Kings 20:12-17). But then the fifteen years passed and he died! Solomon likewise was frustrated with time concerning fleeting material delights, the temporal nature of pleasure, the obsolescence of experience, all like fleeting dreams that were never to be regained. He writes that: "A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. . . . For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man. . . . I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. . . . All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. . . . For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow" (Eccles. 1:4; 2:16, 18; 3:20; 6:12).

- c. But in the midst of his frustration, yet Solomon realized that the answer to this inevitable perplexity, which the temporal order of things brings about, is to be found in the truth that, "everything God does will remain forever" (Eccles. 3:14). Thus he concluded that his soul could only be delivered from this tyranny of time when he, the temporal creature was engaged with the eternal God. Hence, "Fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccles. 12:13). Man became disengaged from the eternal God at the Fall; the result was total captivity to a temporal world that inevitably led to his death. Only through redemption in Jesus Christ is a man restored to eternal perception and an eternal inheritance in a temporal world. Thus, as the recipient of eternal life, the very life of God, man

enters into the eternal dimension which God graciously shares (I John 1:1-2; 2:17).

D. GOD IS OMNISCIENT - INFINITE IN KNOWLEDGE

1. Introduction. The truth that God knows all does not sit well with the natural man, the reason being his pride. Man loves knowledge, though the fact that he has it with limitation, that God knows more than he, is a truth that grates upon him. On the other hand, the Christian humbly admits to his own cognitive limitation and delights in the ultimate resource of the knowledge of the person of God as well as the knowledge of all reality that the person of God has as a fullness.

a. Although God is an intelligent being possessed of perfect knowledge, His creatures, in their fallen condition, choose to live as if His understanding of their lives was limited. For example, man believes:

(1) Some matters are too insignificant for God to be aware of them. He is not concerned about counting atoms or trivia.

(2) God needs to be kept in the picture, brought up to date, otherwise He will be out of touch. He needs to be informed and reminded about facts.

(3) There are secret corners of the human soul that are hid from God. He cannot see in the dark, hear whispers, or know deep motives!

b. A more recent manifestation of limitation being attributed to God's knowledge is Process Theology which, as a product of theological liberalism, defines Him as a "becoming, growing, developing God," so that He does not possess absolute knowledge. Thus God does not know all of the future because it is based upon human contingency concerning possibilities over which He has no absolute sovereignty. A modified form of this humanizing of God, this Arminianism in a new dress, coming from the fringe of evangelicalism, is called Openness Theology.

Central to the open view is a belief that humans have libertarian free will. . . . With creatures who have libertarian free will, there is no iron-clad way to know for certain what they will do. . . . God's lack of knowledge about the future also means that, though he has hopes and plans for what will occur, he may need to scrap them and choose another course of action, once He sees what we do. . . . It also follows with this model of God that God has not foreordained whatever happens. To do so would be to act as a domineering monarch concerned only with what he wants. Since that is not the open God, history is not the working out of his predetermined, irresistible, and sometimes inscrutable decrees. Rather, history is

open to whatever we make it. This makes the future an unknown adventure, not only for us but also for God. Moreover, with such a God our prayers and petitions really do matter; for by them we can move God to do things he otherwise did not plan to do."²²

However, when a person can truly confess, "Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, Thou dost know it all," then one can honestly cry out, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Ps. 139: 23-24).

2. By way of definition, Strong defines divine omniscience as "God's perfect and eternal knowledge of all things which are objects of knowledge, whether they be actual or possible, past, present, or future."²³ In other words, God knows all there is to know about Himself and His universe. "Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite [limitless]." (Ps. 147:5).
 - a. God has no need to discover, learn, or receive advice. Hence, it is impertinent for man to attempt to inform God, to infer that God needs to be reminded of certain details, to recommend possibilities. "¹³ Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has informed Him? ¹⁴ With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding?" (Isa. 40:13-14).
 - b. God does not come to know by a process of observation or reasoning. Rather, His knowledge is immediate total vision; it is innate and intuitive. He knows of man's perception by process and time. Yet His knowledge is not by process and time but eternal. "²⁸Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable" (Is. 40:28). Owen comments: "God knows all things as they are, and in that order wherein they stand. Things that are past, as to the order of the creatures which he hath appointed to them, and the works of providence which outwardly are of him, he knows as past; not by remembrance, as we do, but by the same act of knowledge wherewith he knew them from all eternity, even before they were."²⁴

²² John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, pp. 67-73. Also refer to *The Openness of God* by proponents Pinnock, Rice, Sanders, Hasker, Basinger.

²³ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 282.

²⁴ Owen, *Works*, XII, p. 127.

- c. God being omniscient, it is also to be expected that He is equally omnipresent. For God to fully know His universe He must totally fill it. Consider these related attributes in Psalm 139:1-6, 7-12.
- (1) The *omniscience* of God. “¹ O LORD, You have searched me and known me. ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. ³ You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all. ⁵ You have enclosed me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it.” (Ps. 139:1-6).
 - (2) The *omnipresence* of God. “⁷ Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. ⁹ If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, ¹⁰ Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," ¹² Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.” (Ps. 139:7-12).
3. The extent of God’s knowledge. Only in that God has a fullness of knowledge to which nothing can be added or subtracted is there any extent or dimension concerning divine cognition. Of course man, with his finiteness, has difficulty in comprehending the infinity of the knowledge of God.
- a. God has perfect knowledge of Himself. “¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.” (I Cor. 2:11).
 - (1) This self-knowledge of God has not been acquired or inherited. Rather He has known Himself comprehensively, intimately, eternally, with resulting absolute satisfaction and contentment. He has a true self-image that cannot be increased.
 - (2) This self-knowledge of God includes the interpersonal knowledge of the three persons of the Trinity, one with each other. “He [God] who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*.” (Rom. 8:27). There is perfect knowledge of being and purpose. John Gill explains:

God knows himself in all his persons, and each person fully knows one another; the Father knows the Son, begotten by him, and brought up with him; the Son knows the Father, in whose bosom he lay; and the Spirit knows

the Father and the Son, whose Spirit he is, and from whom he proceeds; and the Father and the Son know the Spirit, who is sent by them as the Comforter; see Matthew 11:27; I Cor. 2:10-11. God knows the mode of each person's subsistence in the Deity, the paternity of the Father, the generation of the Son, and the spiration of the Holy Ghost.²⁵

- (3) This self-knowledge of God is primary in the matter of *The Nature of True Virtue*, as Jonathan Edwards titles one of his most important and profound works. He writes that,

the virtue of the divine mind must consist primarily in *love to himself*, or in the mutual love and friendship which subsists eternally and necessarily between the several persons in the Godhead, or that infinitely strong propensity there is in these divine persons one to another. There is no need of multiplying words, to prove that it must be thus, on a supposition that virtue, in its most essential nature, consists in benevolent affection or propensity of heart towards being in general; and so flowing out to particular beings, in a greater or lesser degree, according to the measure of existence and beauty which they are possessed of. It will also follow, from the foregoing things, that God's goodness and love to created beings, is derived from and subordinate to his love of himself.²⁶

- b. God has perfect knowledge in His triunity as three persons. So God is never lonely; there is blessed, blissful intercourse between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

- (1) God the Father is omniscient. "13And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13; cf. Matt. 6:8; Luke 16:15; I John 3:20).
- (2) God the Son is omniscient. "Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God" (John 16:30; cf. Matt. 9:4; John 2:24-25; 6:64; 21:17; Col. 2:2-3).

- (a) Did Jesus know the "month" of his return?

Does Jesus Christ's deny His omniscience? "36 But of that day and hour [of his coming, vs. 27, 30] no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (Matt. 24:36; cf. Mark 13:32). Was Jesus ignorant of the time of his return? Tortuous attempts to avoid the obvious meaning here have been made by those suggesting that the exact or approximate time of Christ's return may be known.

²⁵ John Gill, " *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, p. 42.

²⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I, pp. 126-7.

For instance there is the proposition that we can know the year or month of Christ's second coming, but not the "day and hour." However, that Jesus is referring to a specific point of time, whether hour, day, month, or year that he was then unaware of, is indicated by the following contextual evidence.

- 1) In Mark 13:33, the word "time," *καιρός*, *kairos*, is a comprehensive, chronological term, which concept is supported by the following illustration of the returning master, vs. 34-37. To "know" of the coming of the master, v. 35, is to "know" of a specific time, "evening [or] . . . midnight [or] . . . morning."
 - 2) Did Jesus know the month of his return, but not the hour or day? To assert this seems absurd, and avoids the truth of an encompassing idiomatic expression, and thus offers a senseless, proposal.
- (b) The maturing humanity of Jesus Christ, clothing His full deity, did not know to begin with the time of his return.
- 1) As a child he "increased in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:53). Likewise as God's Son, "He learned obedience from the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8). Yet after his resurrection, ignorance concerning the time of his return now seems to be stated only with regard to the apostles (Acts 1:7). Had the Father, by then, revealed the time of the kingdom parousia or appearing of the Son to His Son? We do not know.
 - 2) As the incarnate Son of God, he wholly submitted to the will and determination of the Father. "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work'" (John 4:34; cf. Matt. 20:23; 26:39).
 - 3) As the submissive Servant, he at times voluntarily restricted the use of certain of his divine attributes, in the same way that his glory was veiled and briefly unveiled. ⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8; cf. Matt. 26:53; John 5:19-30).

(c) The undiminished deity of Jesus Christ did know the time of his return.

- 1) Admittedly this is a mystery, as is the overall truth that Jesus Christ is the "theanthropic person," or the "God-man." However, his humanity must never be allowed to diminish his deity. Even the seeming restriction of His power as incarnate Son of God, yet at times reflected His former unrestrained creativity and sovereignty (John 1:3), and occasionally it shone through. Such were the times when He sovereignly calmed a storm while afloat on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 8:27) and created loaves and fishes for a crowd of five thousand (Matt. 14:13-21).
- 2) The fulness of Christ as revealed in Scripture must always be studied. "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth' (Matt. 28:18); "For in Him [Jesus Christ] all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2:9; cf. John 21:17). Deity that is not omniscient is not deity.

(d) By way of illustration, Shedd suggests that

the ignorance of Jesus Christ may be illustrated by the forgetfulness of an ordinary man. No man at each and every instant, holds in immediate consciousness all that he has ever been conscious of in the past. He is relatively ignorant of much which he has previously known and experienced. But this forgetting is not absolute and total ignorance. This part of his consciousness may reappear here upon earth; and all of it will reappear in the day of judgment. But he cannot recall it just at this instant. . . . Similarly, as we suppose that Christ when he spoke these words [Matt. 24:36-37; Mark 13:32-33] to his disciples was ignorant of the time of the judgment, he may subsequently have come to know it as his human nature increased in knowledge through the illumination of the Divine. . . . Christ was relatively ignorant, not absolutely, if he was destined subsequently to know the time of the judgment day. It is more probable that the glorified human mind of Christ on the mediatorial throne now knows the time of the day of judgment, though it was ignorant of it.²⁷

- (3) God the Holy Spirit is omniscient. "¹⁰ For to us God revealed them [the things of God's hidden wisdom] through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the

²⁷ Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, II, pp. 276-7.

thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God" (I Cor. 2:10-11).

- c. God has perfect knowledge of His universe. "How great are Thy works, O LORD! Thy thoughts are very deep" (Ps. 92:5).
- (1) Concerning creation in general. "⁴ He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them. ⁵ Great is our LORD and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:4-5).
- (a) Things minute and of least significance. "²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:29-30).
- (b) Things actual, possible and impossible, real and contingent. "⁷ But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious. . . . ⁷ yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate (Ezek. 2:7; 3:7).
- (c) Things past, present, and future. "Behold, the former things have come to pass, now I declare new things; before they spring forth I proclaim them to you" (Is. 42:9; cf. 44:7; 46:9-10). However, this knowledge concerns God's awareness of man's limited, temporal field of vision, even though His actual perception is of everything in the eternal now.
- (2) Concerning mankind in particular. "¹⁰ O LORD, You have searched me and known me. . . . ¹³ For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; ¹⁶ Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them" (Ps. 139:1, 13-16).
- (a) The thoughts of his heart. "Then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men" (I Kings 8:39; cf. II Chron. 16:9; Ps. 44:21; Jer. 17:10; John 2:24-25; I John 3:19-20).

- (b) The evil and good of his soul. “⁹ The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? ¹⁰ I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds” (Jer. 17:9-10; cf. Ps. 7:9; 69:5; Prov. 15:3; Jer. 16:17).
- (c) The span of his life. “Since his [man’s] days are determined, The number of his months is with You; And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass” (Job 14:5; cf. Ps. 139:16).
- (d) The direction of his life. “For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.” (Ps. 1:6). “The steps of a man are established by the LORD, and He delights in his way” (Ps. 37:23; cf. 119:168).
- (e) The future actions which he freely chooses. “It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.’ And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’ And of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid’” (Is. 44:28).
- 1) Some reject this concept since such foreknowledge demands a fixity of future events in man’s life that conflicts with his supposed necessary freedom. Hence, God is not believed to be absolutely omniscient since He cannot know of future events determined by man’s free choice. When man autonomously determines His steps, then God knows his ways.
 - 2) Others suggest that God has advance knowledge of all of man’s possible actions in a given situation. Hence, He is never surprised. But God has a plan to counter whatever man may propose. Yet man retains his initiative while God is merely the sovereign respondent! However actual actions are not foreknown, that is specifically accomplished actions.
 - 3) However, Bavink quotes Augustine as follows:

Wherefore our wills have power to do all that God wanted them to do and foresaw they could do; and therefore, whatever power they have, they have most certainly; and whatever they are to do they themselves most certainly do, for he whose foreknowledge is

infallible foreknew that they would have the power to do it and that they would do it.²⁸

In other words, the mystery is that man's real freedom comes under the certainty of events ordained and foreknown by God. "As for you [Joseph's brethren], you meant evil against me [Joseph], but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

- 4) From God's perspective, His knowledge of future human activity is really His knowledge of man in the eternal now. "4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 5 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.'" (Jer. 1:4-5).
4. The practical importance of God's absolute knowledge. This understanding only has relevance for the child of God. While he has not the slightest anticipation of omniscience, it being such an arrogant thought, yet He delights in the ultimate resource that the knowledge of God provides, it involving a wedding of the spiritual and the factual that is productive of wisdom.
 - a. Charnock makes four major applications concerning God's omniscience.²⁹
 - (1) His boundless knowledge is slandered by man.
 - (a) This happens when man seeks forbidden mysteries and future knowledge in opposition to Deuteronomy 29:29 "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." The inference is that God is partially ignorant. Hence, man grasps after all knowledge like a person who is blinded by incessantly and curiously gazing at the sun.
 - (b) This happens when man swears by anyone or anything besides God. This is to substitute an inferior witness for God who is the only infallible witness.
 - (c) This happens when we judge the actions of a man, as distinct from his thoughts, even though unlike God, we do not truly know the motives

²⁸ Bavink, *Doctrine of God*, p. 190.

²⁹ Charnock, *Works*, I, pp. 517-36.

of his heart. This inference is that man qualifies as a judge with virtual omniscience

- (d) This happens when we neglect to pray so as to seek his all knowing counsel. The inference is that there is an alternative source of absolute knowledge that can be consulted.
- (e) This happens when we make an outright denial of God's omniscience. "Then He said to me, 'The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great, and the land is filled with blood and the city is full of perversion; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!'" (Ezek. 9:9).
 - 1) We deny His full knowledge in *thought* that considers God to be ignorant' "² How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, 'Violence!' Yet You do not save. ³ Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises" (Hab. 1:2-3).
 - 2) We deny His full knowledge in *deeds* that suggest that God is ignorant. "But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3).
 - 3) We deny His full knowledge with *speech* that implies that God is ignorant. "¹³ Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, 'Blessed are you of the LORD! I have carried out the command of the LORD.' ¹⁴ but Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?' ¹⁵ Saul said, 'They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed.'" (I Sam. 15:13-15).
 - 4) We deny His full knowledge with *worship* that presumes that God is ignorant. "Then the Lord said, 'Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,'" (Is. 29:13).

- (2) His boundless knowledge is a comfort to man.
- (a) When the church is assaulted by enemies (Ps. 69:16), yet these adversaries shall not escape God's flaming eyes (Rev. 1:13-14), try as they may to hide. "Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, and whose deeds are done in a dark place, And they say, 'Who sees us?' or 'Who knows us?'" (Is. 29:15).
 - (b) God is especially to be trusted since He is not ignorant or forgetful. His intelligence is wholly dependable, particularly with regard to His covenants. "He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations" (Ps. 105:8).
 - (c) God has well known from eternity with intensity those who belong to Him as Creator, Redeemer, and Shepherd. "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness'" (II Tim. 2:19).
 - (d) While men may be blind to the sincerity and deep feelings of our heart, thankfully God is not since He has infinite understanding (Ps. 1:6). He "knows the least dram of grace and righteousness in the hearts of His people, though but as a 'smoking flax,' or as the least bruise of a saving conviction and knows it so as to cherish it "A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering reed He will not put out, until he leads justice to victory" (Matt. 12:20; cf. Isa. 42:3).³⁰
 - (e) We are comforted in our secret prayers, sighs, and works. Our groans are not hid from God (Ps. 38:9), nor are our hidden labors which He is careful to repay. "⁴ [Give] so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. . . . 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you" (Matt. 6:4, 6).
 - (f) We are encouraged when we have company with good men who are persecuted (Ex. 3:7). As with the poverty of the church, Christ declares to the church at Smyrna, "I know your tribulation . . . but you are rich" (Rev. 2:8-9). There is a future reward for God's suffering servants. He hears their cry and will avenge and reward them. "11 Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of

³⁰ Ibid., p. 527.

evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:11-12).

- (g) We are comforted in the infirmities and weaknesses of the flesh (Ps. 103:14), for God's knowledge of these encourages Him to remove our transgressions. "¹² As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. ¹⁴ For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." (Ps. 103:12-14).
 - (h) We are comforted while being fearful of lurking corruption in our hearts. That is, we appeal to God for a true assessment: "Search me, O God, and try my heart. "²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; ²⁴ and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Ps. 139:23-24).
 - (i) We are comforted in great assurance of pardon for sin. If God well knows our sin, He well knows the greater power of grace through the blood of Christ to cover sin "So that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21).
- (3) His boundless knowledge is humbling to man.
- (a) Man's hoped for secrecy is demolished. "You have placed our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence." (Ps. 90:8). So Jonah's rebellion is known in the privacy of his cabin on the way to Joppa. "But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3).
 - (b) Man's contrived hypocrisy is unmasked as if our bodies were a crystal. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13). All the rooms of the heart, and every atom of dust in the least chink of it, is clear to his eye.
 - (c) Man's carelessness regarding sin is driven away. Old sins rise up to haunt and convict; they are all known of God in the eternal present; they are recorded and resurrected; none are forgotten. "⁷The LORD has

sworn by the pride of Jacob, "Indeed, I will never forget any of their deeds." (Amos 8:7).

- (d) Man's actions are exactly weighed and numbered (I Sam. 2:3). God has spread before Him the guilt of every circumstance. Nothing escapes His careful gaze. "The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD'S throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men" (Ps. 11:4).
 - (e) Man's injustice finds settlement before God's impeccably just knowledge. As both a perfect witness and judge, He will not overlook any transgression, no matter how large our catalogue of sins may be. "And He said to them, 'You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.'" (Luke 16:15).
- (4) His boundless knowledge is an exhortation to man.
- (a) Let us resist the temptation to sin. "For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths" (Prov. 5:20-21). When we are enticed to commit evil, let us first ask, "Would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart" (Ps. 44:21).
 - (b) Let us be watchful over our heart and thoughts, and quick to blush knowing that God probes the soul's every recess. "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (Jas. 1:19).
 - (c) Let us make good preparation for every duty that we perform. With God ever-watchful, we should shrink from being idle, careless, or intemperate. "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (I Cor. 9:25).
 - (d) Let us be stimulated to work before God with transparent sincerity when we are at times unconscious of His watchful eye. "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever" (I Chron 28:9; cf. Gen. 28:16; John 1:48).

- (e) Let us be deeply humbled. As His children, yet He knows our hurt to Him in the face of His blessings, our ingratitude to Him in the face of His benefits, as well as our idolatry, blasphemy, and secret enmity. ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge" (Ps. 51:3-4).
 - (f) Let us yield to God unreservedly since we are naked in His sight and He does see wickedness. "You have seen it, for You have beheld mischief and vexation to take it into Your hand. The unfortunate [poor man] commits himself to You; You have been the helper of the orphan" (Ps. 10:14).
- b. A. W. Tozer concludes that God's omniscience is a source of either shaking fear or consoling hope.³¹
- (1) Concerning *fear*: "The unblessed soul may well tremble that God knows the flimsiness of every pretext and never accepts the poor excuses given for evil deeds, since He knows the underlying motives."
 - (2) Concerning *hope*: "To us who have fled for refuge in the gospel, no talebearer can inform on us, no enemy can make an accusation stick. He knew us utterly before we knew Him and called us to Himself in the full knowledge of everything that was against us."

E. GOD IS OMNISAPIENT - INFINITE IN WISDOM

1. Introduction. Omniscience and omnisapience are closely related since it is the good and holy use of knowledge about God and from God that results in wisdom. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Prov. 9:10).
 - a. Religious man may readily give theoretical acknowledgment concerning God's absolute wisdom, since God could not be God if He were not all-wise. Yet in the practical issues of life, this same representative man may nevertheless quickly charge God with being indiscreet, or at worse foolish. For instance, man may propose:

³¹ Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 63.

- (1) In a given situation, God made a poor move in doing something in a particular way. His *modus operandi* was not the best plan, according to human estimates.
 - (2) God needs man's advice in certain complex situations. Being remote in heaven's heights, and not fully conversant with the contemporary world, He should consider an earthly opinion.
 - (3) Because God's ways are so different from those of contemporary man, they probably will not work very well; the inference is that they are somewhat old fashioned. Hence, God should be updated and listen!
- b. However, when a person follows the example of Solomon and yearns for "an understanding heart" from God (I Kings 3:9), he then concludes, "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold" (Prov. 3:13-14). As a consequence, he delights to give glory "to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 16:27).
2. By way of definition, God's wisdom is that active characteristic which results from the interaction occurring between His *knowledge* and *goodness*. Or as Strong states, the wisdom of God "is omniscience, as qualified by a holy will."³² Once again we are confronted with the importance of considering God's attributes integrally and not in a piecemeal fashion.
- a. Wisdom is the application of knowledge toward a good purpose. Its administration involves the employment of God ordained means that lead to a good end.
- (1) Wisdom is not raw shrewdness or smartness, as in the case of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8). Here knowledge is used with a questionable purpose in mind, even a machiavellian cleverness. We could say that the unrighteous steward was astute, but not wise in a virtuous sense.
 - (2) Wisdom involves the reflective, studied, discriminating transfer of true knowledge through the grid of a good and holy will.
 - (a) Knowledge is data. However wisdom involves practicality; it envisages good activity that prevails even in spite of difficult circumstances.

³² Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 286.

- (b) Knowledge is acquired, learned. However wisdom is also intuitive; it becomes an established, virtuous grid in the soul that is well able to be arranged for application.
 - (c) Knowledge is most efficiently handled according to the degree of intelligence or mental acuity. However wisdom is prudence that sanctifies mental acumen, whether it be great or small.
- (3) Wisdom and knowledge are treated separately in the Bible, yet remain in close relation as Daniel acknowledges. ²⁰ Daniel said, 'Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. ²¹ It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding. ²² It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him. ²³ To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom and power; even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, for You have made known to us the king's matter.'" (Dan. 2:20-23). They are also evident in the harmonious working of spiritual gifts in local church life. ⁸ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit. . . . ¹² For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ" (I Cor. 12:8, 12).
- b. Charnock defines wisdom as, "acting for a right end" while "observing all the circumstances for action." It involves, "willing and acting according to the right reason, according to a right judgment of things. We never count a willful man as wise, but him only that acts according to a right rule, when right counsels are taken, and vigorously executed. . . . Man may have knowledge without wisdom, but not wisdom without knowledge."³³
3. Wisdom in God is an identical characteristic in the three persons of the triune Godhead.
- a. God the Father is wise. "To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 16:27; cf. I Tim. 1:17; Jude 25).
 - b. God the Son is wise. "The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40; cf. Matt. 13:54; I Cor. 1:30; Col. 2:2-3; Rev. 5:12).

³³ Charnock, *Works*, II, pp. 11-12.

- c. God the Holy Spirit is wise. ¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (I Cor. 2:11-13; cf. 12:8).
4. Wisdom in God, especially that manifestation of its "richest depths" (Rom. 11:33-36), that display its "manifold glory" (Eph. 3:8-11), is supremely displayed in the design and outworking of the Gospel. ⁶ Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; ⁷ but we speak God's wisdom [concerning the gospel] in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸ the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;" 1 (I Cor. 2:6-8).

O loving wisdom of our God!
 When all was sin and shame,
 A second Adam to the fight
 And to the rescue came.

5. The practical importance of God's absolute wisdom. By its very nature, wisdom is practical, that is it involves the application of God's holy knowledge and truth to a variety of situations. It always addresses a given circumstance and looks to an end or resolution that is pleasing to God.
- a. God's wisdom is manifest in every aspect of His dealings with His universe.
- (1) In *creation*. "O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; the earth is full of Your possessions" (Ps. 104:24; cf. 19:1-6).
 - (2) In *providence* ¹⁰ The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. ¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation" (Ps. 33:10-11; cf. Rom. 8:28).
 - (3) In *redemption* "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Rom. 11:33; cf. 16:25-27; I Cor. 2:7-8; Eph. 3:7-10).

b. Charnock considers four applications concerning God's wisdom.³⁴

(1) We may confidently say of an all-wise God:

- (a) He is best fitted to govern this world. Having made all things in wisdom (Ps. 104:24), God would not idly stand by and neglect to maintain his creation. He will wisely sustain.
- (b) He has good reason to be patient with man. God forbears until he has brought his Son into the world and manifested his wisdom in redemption; then he call or repentance (Acts 17:30).
- (c) He has no reason to change His decrees. He resolves the end from the beginning, and his counsel stands; moreover it is immoveable because it is wise counsel (Is. 46:10).
- (d) He is the best object of human trust. The words of man's wisdom may seem enticing whereas the words of God's wisdom, rooted in Christ, are firm and stable (I Cor. 1:30; 2:4-5).
- (e) He is the best hope for vanquished evil. It will be judged with a reasonable sentence according to wisdom, clearing up the righteousness of the proceeding, bringing divine vindication (Jude 15).

(2) We may conclude concerning man's wisdom:

- (a) It defames the wise workmanship of God. The sinner in every sin acts as if he intended to put himself in a better posture, and in a fairer dress, than the wisdom of God hath put him in by creation.
- (b) It is disrespectful of God's commandments. They are contrived by his wisdom for the happiness of man, whose happiness, and the methods of it, he understands better than men or angels can do,
- (c) It neglects the true means of worshiping God. When men neglect or oppose God's ordinances, they neglect the counsel of the Lord; they disannul the wisdom of God, the spring of his ordinances.
- (d) It sits in judgment over God's Word. For a man to pray to God to save him, when has not used the means appointed for salvation, he slights the word, which is the instrument of salvation.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 74-98.

- (e) It is reluctant to trust God's promises. Here is an impeachment of his wisdom, a secret reviling of it. We trust the word of a physician or lawyer, but not the wisdom of God.
- (3) We may be comforted by the fact that:
- (a) In affliction and disease, God wisely comforts and removes. He brings the glory of our salvation out of the depths of seeming ruin, and makes the evils of affliction subservient to the good of the afflicted.
 - (b) In temptations and trials, God wisely permits and overrules. Let Satan's intentions be what they will, he can be for him at every turn to outwit him in his stratagems, to baffle him in his enterprises.
 - (c) In our praying, God wisely allows and disallows. He is gracious to hear, but He is wise to answer in an acceptable time, and succor us in a day proper to our salvation (II Cor. 6:2).
 - (d) In church tribulations, God wisely foresees and confounds. There is wisdom superior to the subtleties of men which laughs at their follies, and 'hath them in derision' (Ps. 2:4).
- (4) We ought to give attention to:
- (a) Meditation upon God's wisdom, that is serious, focused reflection upon His creation. This involves all creatures great and small, the vast heavens and the deep oceans, the particles of matter.
 - (b) Investigation and admiration of God's wisdom in redemption. This involves the simplicity and complexity of the gospel, its covenant promise and fulfillment, the glory of the God-man, Jesus Christ.
 - (c) Avoidance of trusting in man's wisdom. Our hope is not primarily in academia, the great intellects of the world, but in the knowledge of the only living and Holy God of Abraham.
 - (d) Pursuit and reception of God's wisdom. Avoiding human ambition that pursues short-lived goals, we press on with determination for the prudence of God which He grants as eternal life.
 - (e) Submission to God's infinite wisdom without criticism. This involves child-like yielding to the word of God through prayer, study and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

- c. God's wisdom is a communicable attribute.
- (1) The wisdom of God is sovereignly endowed, yet certain human attitudes and responses are also involved. "20 Daniel said, 'Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. 21 It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding. 22 It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him. 23 To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom and power; even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, For You have made known to us the king's matter.'" (Dan. 2:20-23; cf. Eph. 1:17). These include:
 - (a) Reverence for God. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever" (Ps. 111:10; cf. Prov. 9:10).
 - (b) Requisition from God. "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (Jas. 1:5; cf. I Kings 3:5-12).
 - (c) Reception of God's Word. "⁹⁷ O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. ⁹⁸ Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine. ⁹⁹ I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation" (Ps. 119:97-99; cf. Col. 3:16; II Tim. 3:15-17).
 - (d) Recognition of Jesus Christ as the fount and incarnation of the wisdom of God. "²³ But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. . . . ³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (I Cor. 1:23-24, 30; cf. Prov. 8:22-31; John 1:1).
 - (2) The wisdom of God is necessary to travel in this foolish world toward the consummated kingdom of God. "¹⁵ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:15-17; cf. Prov. 8:12, 34-35).

- (3) The wisdom of God is productive of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of an authentic child of God. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (Jas. 3:17-18).
- (4) The wisdom of God is to be manifest in a multitude of human attitudes, acts, and relationships, as related by Solomon in the Book of Proverbs. His major concern is that of passing on to his son practical aspects of spiritual prudence. ¹⁹ The LORD by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens. ²⁰ By His knowledge the deeps were broken up and the skies drip with dew. ²¹ My son, let them not vanish from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion," (Prov. 3:19-21).

F. GOD IS OMNIPRESENT - INFINITE WITHIN SPACE

1. Introduction. It ought to be immediately recognized by man that if God is spiritual and the creator of all, then it is to be expected that He is inescapably present everywhere. However for rebellious man, this closeness of God, at every turn, makes him feel uncomfortable; yet for the Christian, "the nearness of God is my good" (Ps. 73:28).
 - a. By way of illustration, in a busy city, you decide to visit a large cathedral. Leaving the noisy street with its commercial secularity, you enter a lofty and majestic stone church with the result that you are struck by the contrasting quiet atmosphere. Your immediate thought is, "Why how real is the presence of God here." But such thinking misunderstands the omnipresence of God for He was equally present out in the busyness of the street.
 - b. By way of illustration, in visiting a maximum security prison, your soul is chilled with the sense of judicial severity and contained evil that pervades such an institution. You say to yourself, "What a godless place this is. Let me leave as soon as is possible." But such thinking ignores God's omnipresence for He is there even in the worst of jails. Similarly He is also present in the greatest dens of iniquity as well as large hospitals where the suffering are kindly treated.
 - c. By way of illustration, a business executive bids his wife and family goodbye as he leaves for a conference some distance away. While absent, the man involves himself with company and activities that would offend his loved ones at home. Why does he do this? Partly because he limits God's perception, indeed he pushes such a troubling thought to the back of his mind. So he willfully ignores His all-pervasive, holy presence.

- d. By way of illustration, in defense of the questionable life-styles of some politicians, it is commonly asserted today that, "what they do in private is their own business." There is the suggestion here of, "out of sight, out of mind;" what the public doesn't know about, it won't be concerned about. However this perspective fails to realize that God is present during those times of sinning in private, so that accountability before Him is not restricted to public affairs.
- e. Even the believer can find himself subject to self-imposed blindness when tempted to sin. Further, he can suddenly be overcome with forgetfulness regarding the presence of God when tempted. The mind foolishly attempts to shut God out; then deceived, it becomes the fertile breeding ground of all types of hypocrisy, concerning which God declares. "Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, and whose deeds are done in a dark place, and they say, 'Who sees us?' or 'Who knows us?'" (Isa. 29:15). Only when the believer is aware of the presence of God in his life at all times, in every place, does he humbly confess at times, as did Jacob at Bethel, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it" (Gen. 28:16).
2. Definition. Strong declares: "God, in the totality of his essence, without diffusion or expansion, multiplication or division, penetrates and fills the universe in all its parts."³⁵ Compare Charnock's similar but expanded definition.³⁶
- a. God was before all else. Hence, creation came into God's presence and did not displace Him. Shedd comments that, "the Divine omnipresence means rather the presence of all things to God, than God's presence to all things. They are in his presence, but he is not in their presence."³⁷ Yet the language of God to man is commonly that of His presence filling all. "²³ 'Am I a God who is near,' declares the LORD, 'and not a God far off? ²⁴ Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?' declares the LORD. 'Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?' declares the LORD" (Jer. 23:23-24; cf. Acts 17:24-28; Eph. 1:23; 4:1-6). Here is further explanation of God's omniscience.
- (1) Both omniscience and omnipresence are intimately related (Ps. 139:1-6, 7-12). Certainly the God who is everywhere must of necessity know everything. Yet man who is here and not there, struggles to grasp such transcendent truth. "⁷ Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee

³⁵ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 279.

³⁶ "[According to Jeremiah 23:24], this essential presence is, 1. without any mixture, 2. without any division of himself, 3. not by multiplication, 4. not by extension or diffusion. 5. There is no space, not the least, wherein God is not wholly according to his essence, and wherein his whole substance doth not exist." Charnock, *Works*, I, pp. 429-431.

³⁷ Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, I, p. 340.

from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. ⁹ If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, ¹⁰ even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me. ¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night,' ¹² even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You" (Ps. 139:6-12).

- (2) By way of illustration, "The atheist wrote: 'God is nowhere,' but his little daughter read it: 'God is now here,' and it converted him."³⁸
- b. God's omnipresence is not merely potential but actual. Yet this real presence does not transform all things into God! C. Samuel Storms clarifies this point as follows: "God is omnipresent according to His being and not merely according to His operation. That is to say, He is *essentially* or *substantially*, not only dynamically, omnipresent. It is the heresy of deism which contends that God is present in all places only by way of influence and power, acting upon the world from a distance, but not *Himself* wholly present throughout. . . . Although God is wholly present throughout all things, He is yet distinct from all things. It does not follow that because God is essentially *in* everything that everything is essentially God. It is the heresy of pantheism that the being of God is one and the same with the being of all reality."³⁹ Refer to Herman Bavinck for a more detailed refutation of both extremes.⁴⁰
- c. God's omnipresence is essential to the persons of His triunity.
- (1) God the Father is in all and through all. "²⁶ And He [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27; cf. Isa. 66:1; Jer. 23:23-24).
- (2) God the Son is in all and through all. "He [Jesus Christ] is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17; cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 1:22-23).
- (3) God the Holy Spirit is in all and through all. "⁷ Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, You

³⁸ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 280.

³⁹ C. Samuel Storms, *The Grandeur of God*, p. 88.

⁴⁰ Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, pp. 159-162.

are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there" (Ps. 139:7-8; cf. Gen. 1:1-2; I Cor. 2:10).

- d. By way of illustration, Spurgeon graphically declares:

We believe that He filleth heaven and earth, and hell; He is in the very space which His creation seems to claim, for creatures do not displace God; and even the space which is occupied by His handiwork is still filled with Himself. The rocky bowels of the unsearched-out depths are full of God; where the sea roars, or where the solid granite lives no interstice [crack] or vacuum, even there is God; not only in the open place, and in the chasm, but penetrating all matter, and abounding everywhere in all, and filling all things with Himself.⁴¹

- e. By way of illustration, Charnock soberly warns man:

How foolish is it to imagine any hiding-place from the incomprehensible God, who fills and contains all things, and is present in every point of the world. When men have shut the door, and made all darkness within, to meditate or commit a crime, they cannot in the most recesses be sheltered from the presence of God. . . . Hypocrites cannot disguise their sentiments from him; he is in the most secret nook of their hearts. No thought is hid, no lust is secret, but the eye of God beholds this. . . . We may exclude the sun from peeping into our solitudes, but not the eyes of God from beholding our actions.⁴²

3. Problems that seem to confront God's omnipresence.

- a. The Bible speaks of God as being distinctively located.

(1) In other words, is it possible for God to be more present in one place than another? How can God be distinctively present in heaven and yet everywhere? How can God be distinctively present in the believer and yet everywhere? Is God more distinctively present in heaven than in hell?

(2) God is present everywhere in His essence, yet especially present in His moral being in certain situations. Since God is holy, He is especially present in heaven while also being present in hell.

(a) Berkhof declares that God, "does not dwell on earth as He does in heaven, in animals as He does in man, in the inorganic as He does in the organic creation, in the wicked as He does in the pious, nor in the Church as He does in Christ."⁴³

⁴¹ Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, VII, p. 426.

⁴² Charnock, *Works*, I, p. 450.

⁴³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 61.

(b) Bavinck rightly makes the same distinction:

[God] is not present in the same degree and manner everywhere. Scripture everywhere teaches that heaven, though also created, has been God's dwelling and throne ever since it was called into being (Deut. 26:15; II Sam. 22:7; I Kings 8:32; Ps. 11:4; 33:13; 115:3, 16; Isa. 63:15; Matt. 5:34; 6:9; John 14:2; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 4:1 ff., etc.). But from heaven God descends (Gen. 11:5, 7; 18:21; Ex. 3:8), walks in the garden (Gen. 3:8), appears often and at various places (Gen. 12; 15; 18-19; etc.), and in a special sense comes down to his people on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:9, 11, 18, 20; Deut. 33:2; Judg. 5:4).⁴⁴

(c) Although Solomon declares that "the highest heaven cannot contain You" (I Kgs. 8:27), yet God especially dwells "above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony" (Ex. 25:22).

(d) Although God is present with all of Israel (Ex. 29:45), yet He is especially present before Moses on Mt. Sinai since the prophet's face is caused to shine at that place (Ex. 34:29).

b. The Bible speaks of the ubiquity of Jesus Christ.

(1) Consider the clear teaching of the Son of God. "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst" (Matthew 18:20); "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (28:20). Then how is it possible for him, as the theanthropic person, to be everywhere in the light of John 14:2-3 "2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."? Furthermore, how can Jesus Christ be everywhere if he has ascended and now sits at the right hand of the Father "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." (Col. 3:1; cf. Acts 2:32-33)?

(a) It is not sufficient to say that Jesus Christ is omnipresent through the Holy Spirit. "9However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (Rom. 8:9; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). The person of Jesus Christ is nor merely omnipresent by representation.

⁴⁴ Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 157.

- (b) Yet it would seem that we can definitely claim that the physical body of Jesus Christ was not omnipresent, even in its initial post-resurrection state ⁹ And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. ¹¹ They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’” (Acts 1:9-11).
- (2) Of special significance at this point is John 3:13 (NKJV): “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”
- (a) While the NASB and NIV omit the phrase, “who is in heaven,” yet the textual support for this expression is reasonably solid, witness its inclusion in the *American Standard Version* of 1901 and the *New English Bible* of 1970.
- (b) Charnock makes an illuminating comment on this verse as follows:

Not which *was*, but which *is* [in heaven]; he comes from heaven by incarnation, and remains in heaven by his divinity. He was, while he spake to Nicodemus, locally on earth, in regard of his humanity, but in heaven according to his deity, as well as upon earth in the union of his divine and human nature. He descended upon earth, but he left not heaven; he was in the world before he came in the flesh.⁴⁵

In support of this John Gill refers to:

the omnipresence of the divine nature in Christ, who, as a divine person, was in heaven, when he, a man, was here on earth (John 1:18; 3:13) and, indeed, unless he was omnipresent, he could not be in whatsoever place two or three are gathered together in his name, or be in the midst of the candlesticks, the churches, or with his ministers, to the end of the world (Matt. 18:20; 28:29).⁴⁶

- (3) Colossians 1:17 speaks of Jesus Christ: “And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together [exist, cohere].” Vincent cites Athanasius concerning this verse: “He, the All-powerful, All-holy Word of the Father, spreads His power over all things everywhere, enlightening things seen

⁴⁵ Charnock, *Works*, I, p. 445.

⁴⁶ Gill, *Body of Divinity*, p. 31.

and unseen, holding and binding all together in Himself. Nothing is left empty of His presence, but to all things and through all, severally and collectively, He is the giver and sustainer of life."⁴⁷

4. The practical importance of God's omnipresence.

- a. Man cannot hide himself from God's presence. "²³ 'Am I a God who is near,' declares the LORD, 'And not a God far off?' ²⁴ Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?' declares the LORD. 'Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?' declares the LORD" (Jer. 23:23-24).

(1) By way of illustration, Thomas Manton comments:

God is everywhere, here where you are; nearer and more intrinsic to us than our very souls. Therefore all we think, speak, or do, is better known to him than it is to ourselves; we do all as in his sight, speak all as in his hearing, think all as in his presence; that which can be absent is not God; you may be far from him, but he is not far from every one of you [Acts 17:27].⁴⁸

- (2) The unbeliever cannot run away from God; he is always running into Him! The person of Jesus Christ is His precise image "Jesus said to him, 'Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9; cf. Col. 1:15); man's conscience ceaselessly testifies to Him "They [the Gentiles] show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" (Rom. 2:15). Try as we can to forget or ignore the Father and His Son, yet His presence relentlessly confronts us.
- (3) The believer cannot stay away from God; for him there is no such thing as personal privacy, nor does he desire it. "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works" (Ps. 73:28).
- (a) In his unregenerate state he detested God's presence; now he enjoys it and would be unhappy without it. He may bow in fear and humility before God, but he does not despitely turn from God.
- (b) "You will make known to me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures for ever" (Ps. 16:11; cf. 63:1-2; 73:25-28; 84:1-4).

⁴⁷ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies In The New Testament*, III, p. 471.

⁴⁸ Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, XII, p. 244.

- b. Man can hide himself within God's presence "7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. 9 If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, 10 even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me. 11 If I say, 'Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night,' 12 even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You" (Ps. 139:7-12).
- (1) Note that David's description of God's omnipresence is not so much a stimulus to fear as to hope and comfort. So Spurgeon declares: "Not that the Psalmist wished to go from God, or to avoid the power of divine life. . . . The exploring missionary in his lonely wanderings is led, in his solitary feebleness he is held; . . . and in this respect it matters not what realms they resort, the active energy of God is around them still."⁴⁹
- (2) Note the various aspects of God's reassuring presence.
- (a) The nature of His presence, v. 7. The ministry of the Holy Spirit, synonymous with God, is inescapable
- (b) The height and depth of His presence, v. 8. It reaches from the glory of heaven to the darkness of death.
- (c) The breadth of His presence, v. 9. Should I travel from the early morning to the ocean's extremity, God is always there.
- (d) The intimacy of His presence, v. 10. At the remotest parts of the earth, the fatherly hand of God will protect.
- (e) The penetration of His presence, vs. 11-12. When overcome with the fear of darkness, the light of God's presence will be there.
- (3) Hence, for the believer in Jesus Christ "who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). His omnipresence, from eternity, both stimulates and establishes the local church "4 Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (Eph. 1:4-6).

⁴⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, VII, pp. 236-7.

- c. Charnock concludes with the following useful applications concerning God's omnipresence.⁵⁰
- (1) Let us be warned:
 - (a) God's presence is commonly forgotten. "[Adam] said, 'I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.'" (Gen. 3:10).
 - (b) God's presence is frequently despised. "The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight, saying, 'No eye will see me,' and he disguises his face" (Job 24:15).
 - (2) Let us be comforted:
 - (a) In all violent temptations. No fiery dart can be so present with us, as God is present both with that and the marksman. "⁴ Do all the workers of wickedness not know, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the Lord? ⁵ There they are in great dread, for God is with the righteous generation" (Ps. 14:4-5).
 - (b) In sharp afflictions. Good men have a comfort in this presence in their nasty prisons, oppressing tribunals; in the overflowing waters or scorching flames, he is still with them (Isa. 43:2); and many times, by his presence, keeps the bush from consuming, when it seems to be all in a flame. "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me up" (Ps. 27:10).
 - (c) In all duties of worship. God promised to meet the Israelites in the place where he should set his name, and in all places where he doth record it. "You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you" (Ex. 20:24).
 - (d) In special tasks and offices. So God did assure the prophets of old when He set them difficult tasks; and strengthened Moses against the face of Pharaoh, by assuring him he would "be with his mouth" (Exod. 4:12). Similarly the apostles were assured. "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

⁵⁰ Charnock, *Works*, I, pp. 448-456.

- (e) In the presence of all of His attributes. In the promising of His presence, God does not mean a part of it, but the whole, the presence of all the excellencies of his nature to be manifested for our good. It is not a piece of God is here, and other parcel there, but God in his whole essence and perfections; in his wisdom to guide us, his power to protect and support us, his mercy to pity us, his fullness to refresh us, and his goodness to relieve us.
- (3) Let us be exhorted:
- (a) His presence ought to shield us against temptations. We are utterly senseless of a Deity if we are not moved by the truth that God is present. Had our first parents actually considered the nearness of God to them, when they were tempted to eat of the forbidden fruit, probably they would not have been overcome by the temptation. What soldier would revolt before the eye of a revered General?
- (b) His presence ought to stimulate us to holy obedience. What man would do an unworthy action, or speak an unhandsome word in the presence of his prince? "I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, For all my ways are before You" (Ps. 119:168). Communion with God consists chiefly in an ordering of our ways as in the presence of him that is invisible.
- (c) His presence ought to encourage purity of worship. "2 The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, 'I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.' 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' 5 Then He said, 'Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' 6 He said also, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Ex. 3:2-6).

G. GOD IS IMMENSE - INFINITY BEYOND SPACE

1. By way of definition, God's immensity involves His transcendent relationship to space. This means that He is not confined or subject to space. Hence God is literally "immeasurable," beyond measure. Thus Solomon declares: "But will God indeed

dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!" (I Kgs. 8:27).

- a. Since space involves the relationship between things, and God is the creator of all things and space as a consequence, it then follows that God is greater than space. Space is the realm of the creation, but His dwelling place is infinitely beyond and involves spiritual dimensions involving measurements that man in space cannot comprehend.
 - b. God's omnipresence is part of His immensity. Shedd declares: "Omnipresence has respect to the universe of created beings and things; so space as filled. Immensity has reference to this, and to what is beyond."⁵¹ Berkhof explains: "'Immensity' points to the fact that God transcends all space and is not subject to its limitations, while 'omnipresence' denotes that He nevertheless fills every part of space with His entire being."⁵²
 - c. God is immeasurable and transcends our spacial/temporal terms of measurement. John Dagg writes that, "the essence of God is immense or unmeasured, . . . because it is spiritual, and, therefore without such dimensions as may be measured by feet and inches; and because, in whatever sense dimensions may be ascribed to it, these dimensions are boundless."⁵³
 - d. Concerning Solomon's understanding of God's immensity described in I Kings 8:27, Charnock adds: "Considering the immensity of God's essence, [Solomon] wonders that God should order a house to be built for him. . . . He that is not contained in the heavens, as a man is in a chamber, is without, and above, and beyond the heavens; it is not said they do not contain him, but it is impossible they should contain him, they 'cannot contain him.'"⁵⁴
2. What practical lessons then should we learn from God's immensity, that is His surpassing presence, as described by Solomon in I Kings 8:27?
 - a. Whatever difficulty we may have in grasping such infinite truth, yet we are assured by Solomon's subsequent prayer in I Kings 8:28-53 that God, in His immensity, is yet ready to bow and hear, then be gracious and merciful.

⁵¹ Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, I, p. 340.

⁵² Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 61.

⁵³ John L. Dagg, *Manual Of Theology*, p. 62.

⁵⁴ Charnock, *Works*, I, pp. 431-2.

- b. Though God be immense, yet this perfection never hinders the particular focus of His omnipresence, specifically by means of His “eyes” and “ears,” upon the penitent groans of His children (I Kings 8:28-53).
- c. This God of Israel *alone* is to be worshiped. There cannot be two immense gods. To regard any other god is to insult His unique greatness. “The LORD is God; there is no one else” (I Kings 8:59-60).
 - (1) He is to be worshiped with obedience, walking in His statutes and commandments (I Kings 8:61).
 - (2) He is to be worshiped with acceptable sacrifices; Solomon is to walk with “integrity of heart and uprightness” (I Kings 8:62-64; 9:1-5).
- d. However God may condescend to accommodate Himself to man’s material/temporal/spacial existence by dwelling in a temple, yet the excellence of His spiritual and essential immensity must always be our greater focus and concern.

H. GOD IS IMMANENT - INFINITE WITHIN CREATION

1. By way of definition, God is intimately and actively present within His creation; He is very near and close by His creatures in particular. “²⁶ And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'” (Acts 17:26-28).
 - a. Immanence is an attribute of God coexisting with His transcendence. “Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?” declares the LORD. “Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” declares the LORD” (Jer. 23:24; cf. Gen. 1:2; 2:7; Job 27:3; 33:4; 34:14-15; Isa. 63:11; Mic. 3:8; Hag. 2:5).
 - b. While God is omnipresent, His immanence focuses attention upon a close interest in His creation. In the material sphere it is a real pervasive presence, especially as its upholder. In the sphere of the creature it is a real personal presence, especially in terms of relationship.
 - c. The immanence of God is only properly regarded when it is comprehended along with equal regard for God’s transcendence. True worship of the God who indwells the believing heart only retains a right sense of awe and reverence when we realize that this same God inhabits eternity. “For thus says the High

and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15 NKJV).

2. The comprehension of God as immanent with little regard for His transcendence, His beyondness, is associated with a variety of doctrinal errors, cults, and major world religions.
 - a. Pantheism. God is all, and all is God. Hence the universe is God; He is without personality, while being the substance of all things. The individual strives to become absorbed within the collective whole. Pantheistic religions include:
 - (1) Hinduism. The one divine essence is Brahma, a neuter divine power or world-soul. Hence, all the world is Brahma, even the soul of man, which must come to this realization through the process of reincarnation. Brahamans are the highest cast of Hindu priests.
 - (2) Buddhism. Having a kinship with Hinduism, man as part of the universal consciousness aspires to enlightenment through successive reincarnations within nature. Past experiences or karma are transcended when nirvana is attained, the extinction of individuality.
 - (3) Christian Science. Mary Baker Eddy taught that God is Divine Principle, Life, Truth, Love, Soul, Spirit, Mind. God is good and good is God. The only reality and existence is Divine Mind and His ideas. As a consequence, evil, sin, sickness are a non-reality.
 - b. Classic Liberalism. There is no sacred/secular distinction since God is naturally rather than supernaturally at work in all the world. Hence the world is explained naturally. So Jesus Christ is human, but not divine. "God is within nature rather than beyond or outside it."⁵⁵
 - c. Relational theology. God is subjectively comprehended as the ground of all-important human interpersonal relationship, especially in a utilitarian sense. Subjective, egocentric, horizontal and utilitarian emphases restrict objective, theocentric, vertical holy reverence.

⁵⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 304-6.

I. GOD IS TRANSCENDENT - INFINITE BEYOND CREATION

1. By way of definition, God is beyond and above all of creation. The majesty of His regnant glory surpasses both matter and the natural world. Thus according to Erickson, "God is separate from and independent of nature and humanity."⁵⁶ In particular, His supremacy places Him above all rational creatures. "⁸ 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. ⁹ 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isa. 55:8-9; cf. Job 11:7-8; I Tim. 6:13-16).
 - a. Transcendence is an attribute of God coexisting with His immanence. "¹ Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Ps. 90:1-2; cf. Exod. 15:11; Ps. 115:3-6; Isa. 40:22-25; 66:1; Hab. 2:20; Eph. 4:6).
 - b. While God is omnipresent, His transcendence focuses attention upon Him as being inexpressibly distinct from His creation. In the material sphere, His perfect spirituality presents a radical distinction. In the sphere of the creature, His holy attributes declare Him to be unspeakably lofty and unapproachable, except for the truth of His immanence.
 - c. The transcendence of God is only properly regarded when it is comprehended along with equal regard for God's immanence. When Isaiah was overwhelmingly confronted with "the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted" (Isa. 6:1), yet that same God condescended to mediate particular grace to a smitten sinner (Isa. 6:6-7).
 - d. By way of illustration, Tozer well instructs and warns us when he writes:

We must not think of God as highest in an ascending order of beings, starting with the single cell and going on up from the fish to the bird to the animal to man to angel to cherub to God. This would be to grant God eminence, even pre-eminence, but that is not enough; we must grant Him *transcendence* in the fullest meaning of that word. Forever God stands apart, in light unapproachable, . . . Conversely, the self-assurance of modern Christians, the basic levity present in so many of our religious gatherings, the shocking disrespect shown for the Person of God, are evidence enough of deep blindness of heart. Many call themselves by the name of Christ, talk much about God, and pray to Him sometimes, but evidently do not know who He is. "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life," but this healing fear is today hardly found among Christian men.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 312.

⁵⁷ Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, pp. 76, 78.

2. The comprehension of God as transcendent with little regard for His immanence, His intense closeness, is associated with a variety of doctrinal errors, cults, and major world religions.
 - a. Gnosticism. This early church heresy comprehended the Supreme Being, or the Absolute as ineffably and exclusively spiritual. Consequently, this Being was utterly beyond the inferior material realm since it was believed to be intrinsically evil.
 - b. Mohammedanism. Since “God is great,” in His sovereignty and dominion, man must bow with awe and obedience. However, there is no gracious, spiritual union with Allah that prompts the child of God to pray, “My Father, . . .”
 - c. Deism. Although God is personal and Creator, a denial of the Trinity reflects His more remote involvement with this present world. Like a clock, God has wound up our immediate universe so as to let it run without His close, hovering, brooding, redemptive concern.
 - d. Neo-orthodoxy. For Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Emil Brunner, God is transcendent existentially rather than objectively. Hence existential faith is placed in the real, subjective living Word, the Logos Christ, rather than inscripturated, propositional truth, concerning Jesus Christ.
3. Both God’s immanence and transcendence ought to be comprehended together. Erickson provides the following description of implications for each attribute in relation to transcendence.⁵⁸
 - a. The implications of God’s immanence.
 - (1) God is not limited to working directly to accomplish His purposes. He may heal directly through believing prayer, yet instead He may also employ a skilled doctor to heal.
 - (2) God may use persons and organizations, not even being avowedly Christian. He may use believers to do His right will, yet He may also work through a pagan nation, such as Assyria, to accomplish His right judgment.
 - (3) We should have an appreciation for all that God has created. He is present and active within it. While it has been given by man to be used to satisfy his legitimate needs, he ought not to selfishly exploit it.

⁵⁸ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 311-12, 317-19.

- (4) We can learn something about God from His creation. We may detect clues about what God is like by observing the behavior of His creation, such as in orderliness and regularity. Reason can help our understanding here.
 - (5) God's nearness has gospel relevance for the unbeliever. If God is to some extent active and present within the whole of the created world, then He is not so far from man in terms of evangelistic proclamation (Acts 17:27).
- b. The implications of God's transcendence.
- (1) God, being higher than man, cannot be completely framed in human terms. The value of man is not he is the highest product of the evolutionary process, but that the God of glory has made him in His own image.
 - (2) God can never be completely captured in human concepts. Our understanding cannot limit or exhaust His nature. Neither is there any way in which we humans can adequately represent or approach God.
 - (3) Our salvation is not our achievement. He must descend to deliver. It is impossible for man to find his way to God. What we know of Him only comes from self-revelation, and this is supreme in the gospel.
 - (4) There will always be a difference between God and man. Even when redeemed and glorified, we will still be renewed, created human beings. He will always be God and Creator, and we will always be humans.
 - (5) Reverence is appropriate in our relationship with God. While transcendence allows for joy and vitality in worship, there must still be a dominant sense of awe and wonder for He remains almighty, sovereign Lord.
 - (6) We will look for genuinely transcendent working by God beyond nature. Worldly humanism will not limit us. Both faith and prayer will look for God's response that will not be limited by mere human reason.

