



Lesson 5 – God Is Great

Many children have learned the simple phrase: “God is great. God is good. Let us praise Him as we should.” As often happens when studying God, this little statement is both simple yet deeply profound. It’s simple enough that a child can understand it, but it’s deep enough that a theologian will never reach the bottom of it. God is both great and good. His power is far beyond anything we could comprehend, and His goodness is far more than we should have dared to hope for. In this lesson, we will take some time to meditate on God’s greatness, and in the next lesson we will spend some time considering His goodness.

Many Christians today struggle from too small a view of God. When studying God, theologians describe His immanence (meaning that He is near to us) and His transcendence (meaning that He is far above us). The Bible presents a God that is both with us but that is also far greater than us, and the church throughout history has struggled to hold these two truths in balance. At times there has been such a high view of God’s transcendence that Christians forgot the close relationship we have with God through Christ. But there have been other times when the nearness of God has so been so emphasized that God becomes more of a buddy than a holy Creator to whom we must give account. If we look at where the balance is today, it’s safe to say that people today have too low a view of God.

In what ways has the church lost sight of the bigness of God? What do you think the result of this will be?

A big view of God is necessary if we are going to live faithfully for God. Those who fail to grasp how big and powerful God is will fear the wrong things. Rather than fearing God, they will fear people, circumstances, the world, and other things in the creation. A true understanding of the greatness and power of God will help us to lift our eyes from the mundane and see behind it all someone who should be feared and who can give us the confidence we need to face without fear the challenges that come our way.

When faced with God, we find ourselves dealing with Someone who is so completely other we fall into the danger God warns about in Psalm 50:21: we begin to think God is like us.

How can we avoid the danger of thinking that the God we serve is like us temporal, finite, changing creatures?

The solution to this problem, of course, is to study what God’s Word has to say about Himself and to allow our minds to be shaped by Scripture rather than by our experience. In our experience we will never meet another creature like God, which means we must trust what the Bible says about Him even if we find it hard to grasp.

God's Eternality

Everything we use had a beginning. Every person we meet had a beginning. Every building, nation, philosophy, technology, everything we see and touch and know had a beginning. The best loved superhero stories are often "origin stories." Married couples often get asked, "How did you meet?" History classes teach students the founding of our nation. We like to know the beginning of things, because knowing how something began tells us a lot about it. Which is why it is so hard for us to think about a God who had no beginning.

Psalm 90:1-2 teaches that before God created the earth with its grand mountains, God has been God. Before creation, God existed. From everlasting to everlasting is another way of saying "for all eternity." God has always existed, and because of that He has been the dwelling place for His people. He has served as their refuge. The Psalmist goes on to praise God for the fact that people may come and go, will rise and fall, but God alone stands outside of time (90:3-4; cf 2 Peter 3:8). For God, a thousand years is as one day, so while people wear out and fade away and the generations march on, God remains outside of it all, unmoved.

God also describes Himself as "the first" and "the last" (Isaiah 44:6), a phrase that Christ adopts when He calls Himself the "Alpha and Omega" (Revelation 1:8). God has been there from the very beginning, and He will be there at the very end. In fact, God Himself stands outside of time. Just as God is not limited by space, He likewise declares the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10) because He is present at both the end and the beginning.

How should the eternity of God impact the way we think about Him?

How might believers accidentally find themselves thinking of God as if He like us, limited by time?

How can the eternity of God be a comfort to God's children? How can the eternity of God produce appropriate fear in the hearts of people?

God's Infinity

It's always frustrating when you run out. Living in a world of limited resources, we are constantly running out of things. We run out of time, out of money, out of battery, and this makes it hard for us to relate to a God who never runs out of anything. God never lacks, He has and is all that He will ever need. In fact, God's infinity stands behind all His other attributes. God is not simply holy; God is infinitely holy. God is not simply loving; God is infinitely loving. God is not simply wise, God is infinitely wise.

The infinity of God is often summed up in three "omni's" – omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotent. God is omnipresent, meaning He is present in all locations at all times. He is omniscient, meaning He has all knowledge. Finally, He is omnipotent, meaning He has the power to do anything He wants.

God's Omnipresence

The Bible teaches that God is everywhere present. In Psalm 139 the psalmist makes this point quite forcefully when he argues that no matter where he goes, God will follow him and find him (Psalm 139:7-12). This is both comforting and terrifying, as it means everything we do (Proverbs 15:3) and say (Luke

12:2-3) are known by a holy God. Jonah tried running away from God, and quickly found out there is nowhere you can run where God is not (Jonah 1:9-10).

What difference will it make in the life of a believer if they truly believe that God is with them at all times?

God's Omniscience

We often use the phrase "know-it-all" to make fun of someone who thinks they are always right. This expression is an insult because we realize that as people, no one knows it all, or even close. In fact, for someone to claim they know it all would be laughably absurd. But God really does know it all. He knows everything that has happened. He knows everything that is happening right now. And He knows everything that will ever happen. Scripture tells us that God's eyes are everywhere, watching everything (Proverbs 15:3). Jesus tells us that not even a single bird dies without God's knowledge, and that even the number of hairs on our head are numbered (Matthew 10:29-30). David marvels that God's knowledge of him is so thorough. God knows him inside and out and David is overwhelmed by this truth (Psalm 139:1-6).

In all of these instances, the knowledge of God is a very personal matter. God knows all about *me*. It's true that God knows quantum physics and He understands economics better than anyone alive and that He can count the stars, but the Bible emphasizes that God knows all about me and you! And, as we saw last week, God's perfect knowledge is combined with His perfect wisdom to mean that He always uses His knowledge perfectly to attain the right goals and get there the right way.

How can God's perfect knowledge of you be a comfort? How might it instill a healthy fear?

God's Omnipotence

God's power is limitless. There is nothing that He wills that He is unable to carry out. When He seeks to accomplish something there is no limit to His resources. Anything God wants to do He can do, and no one and nothing can stand in His way. God's mighty power is seen repeatedly throughout Scriptures in the miracles He performs, from controlling nature, to wiping out hostile armies, to allowing barren women to conceive, to raising the dead. When God revealed Himself to Abraham, He revealed Himself as "Almighty God," the God who can do anything. When summing up the power of God, the angel told a confused Mary "with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). God does whatever He so desires, as we read in Psalm 115:13 "But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

How can the omnipotence of God be a comfort to believers?

Now, omnipotence does not mean that God can do *anything*. Omnipotence is commonly defined this way, but it's a slightly careless definition and skeptics will latch onto it and smugly ask if God can create a rock so large He can't lift it. The answer is no, God can't do that because it is a logical impossibility. Omnipotence doesn't mean God can create a square circle or a round triangle. To say God can do anything does not mean that God can do the logically absurd; it means He can do whatever is consistent with His will and His character. The same applies to sin. God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18) because lying is against His character and will. But there are many things consistent with God's will that are impossible for us, and so we often find ourselves watching God do things that we never thought possible because of His great power (Luke 18:27).

God's Immutability

Malachi states "I am the Lord, I change not." Theologians have invented the fancy word immutability (not able to mutate, or change) to describe the fact that God never changes. Change makes us uneasy. If God changed, He might require one thing from us today and something else tomorrow. He might help us in a few weeks but not today. As much as we try to be constant, we are not. We are fickle and are far too easily swayed. But in a world where it feels like everything is changing all the time, we serve a God who never changes. Specifically, this means that character doesn't change, His promises don't change, and His plans don't change.

Why do we change? Is it good that we change? Should we seek to be like God and be constant, or should we change?

God's Character Doesn't Change

When we say that God doesn't change, that means first and foremost that the character of God doesn't change. Psalm 102:25-27 connects God's eternity with His unchanging nature. Since God is eternal and stands outside of time, He doesn't erode or wear out. Since He stands outside of time, He never grows by learning more or doing things better. He is perfect now, He always has been perfect, and He always will be perfect. God never decides that He has been too harsh on us, or too easy, or too apathetic.

How might the unchanging nature of God help the believer?

James 1:17 ties God's unchanging nature to the good gifts He gives. After warning sin brings death, James reminds His audience that in contrast God is good. And God is unchanging, He is unlike a shifting shadow. And if God is unchanging, then His gifts are always good, and only God's gifts are goods. The application is fairly apparent: God's gifts are good. Sin is not.

Why do we struggle to believe what James says about the sin bringing death and the unchanging goodness of God?

God's Promises Don't Change

Every parent knows the dread of hearing "But you promised!" Sometimes the word promise was never used, but that can be a hard distinction to make to a three-year-old. Sometimes plans have changed and an awkward conversation must follow about why something is no longer even possible. God never has to explain anything away. When He promises something, it will certainly happen (Hebrews 6:16-18). Through Jesus Christ, God has and will fulfill every promise that He has ever made (2 Corinthians 1:20), and we as believers must live believing God's promises even when we struggle to see how God could come through (Hebrews 11:13).

What promises can we as believers claim?

How should we respond when we find it difficult to believe the promises of God?

God's Purposes Don't Change

Scripture tells us "God is not a man, that he should lie; Neither the son of man, that he should repent: Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" When God sets out to do something, He will accomplish His purpose. So what about when we read that God repented

that He did something, like making man (Genesis 6:6) or appointing Saul as king (1 Samuel 15:11)? What about when God warns that a certain thing will happen but then doesn't follow through, like wiping out Israel and starting over with Moses (Exodus 32:9-14) or destroying Nineveh (Jonah 3:10)? Do any of these examples mean that God changed?

Well, when we read that it repented God that He had made man or made Saul king, that means that He felt sorrow over the current situation. That doesn't mean that if He had to go back He would have done things differently. As for Israel and Nineveh, in both cases God responded to the petitions of people. God reserves the right to announce His plans but He also has decided to respond to the petitions of people. In fact, Moses pleads with God on the basis of God's own character, and Jonah would later tell God He didn't want to go to Nineveh because he knew (based on Exodus 34:6-7) that God would forgive if the people repented (Jonah 4:2). Both men believed that God's unchanging character would allow Him to change His stated plans in response to a humble, broken petition.

God is eternal, infinite, and unchanging. This should be a comfort for us, because it means that God is big enough to handle all our problems and He can be trusted to do so! This should cause us to fear, because it means that God doesn't fit in our pockets and we must bend to His will, not He to ours. But most of all this should inspire worship, because our great Creator deserves our praise! God is great. God is good. Let us praise Him as we should.