

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

3. ONE PAIR RELATED: SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND LOVE

A. SELF-SUFFICIENCY

1) DEFINITION

His possession of his qualities is both intrinsic and infinite. With wisdom, God possess that quality intrinsically. He is the only wise God. His wisdom never comes to an end. He never comes across some problem where he says, "This one is just too big for me; I can't sort that one out, I can't figure out what to do with this mess." No, never; he is always infinitely wise and able to discern what is best every time, for everything. It never fails.

Take power; the power of God is his possession intrinsically. Nobody has to give him power. He is not out there looking for help to do things. "This project that I have in mind, this is going to take some help from some other people out there; I need some missionaries. If I am going to reach the world, this is a big order, and I need some volunteers here. If you don't go, how is it going to happen?" God has intrinsic power. He doesn't need me and you to help him for anything. He may choose to use you and me; that is another story and another issue. He doesn't need us; he doesn't need anything else because he has it all within himself and his power is infinite. It never ends; there is no boundary to it.

His love, his grace, and his mercy are intrinsic and infinite. You could go on and on. He possesses every quality within himself, intrinsically, and he does so without limit, or measure. He does so infinitely.

Another way to define self-sufficiency would be that God is, in and of himself, sufficient for all things. Whatever God chooses to do, whatever God envisions, he has within himself all that is required to accomplish that work.

2) SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT

Is this really taught in the Bible? It is. Here are some of the passages where self-sufficiency is indicated. It just pervades the Bible. You begin to see it from Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens in the earth." Self-sufficiency is the fabric of the God of the Bible. There are some special passages that make this clear.

Psalm 50 is a very interesting Psalm. Israel is on trial and God is the judge as well as the attorney charging them, the prosecuting attorney. He is holding them accountable before his bar of justice.

Ps 50:4 He summons the heavens above, And the earth, to judge his people: Ps 50:5 "Gather my godly ones to me, Those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice."

Clearly, he is talking about the people of Israel, his own people. Those who have practiced the sacrificial system he has put in place.

Ps 50:6 And the heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge. Selah.

He is calling heaven and earth to bear witness, his people are on trial, God is judging them. What is the charge against them?

Ps 50:7 "Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God. Ps 50:8 "I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, and your burnt offerings are continually before me. Ps 50:9 "I shall take no young bull out of your house nor male goats out of your folds. Ps 50:10 "For every beast of the forest is mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. Ps 50:11 "I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is mine. Ps 50:12 "If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine and all it contains.

What is going on here? He first of all tells them what they are not guilty of. You are not guilty of failing to bring sacrifices before me. You are doing that. You are bringing your bulls out of your herds and your sheep and goats out of your flocks. You are doing this. So, what is the problem? What are they doing wrong? God told them to sacrifice; they are sacrificing.

Here is the problem. Israel is doing this, evidently, with the same mindset toward sacrifices as the pagan nations surrounding her. The pagan nations believed that the gods were needy, that they got literally hungry. When they brought a sacrifice to them, the god was satisfied; he ate it, his stomach was full, and he would now bless the people who fed him.

If you don't think this is real, visit animistic cultures, anywhere in the world and you will see this is the case; they are appeasing the gods. This is what consumes 2/3 of the world today who live with animistic ways of thinking. These pagan nations that surrounded Israel believed that these gods got hungry, and they would go and feed them. What picture does this paint of God and us? As we sacrifice to God we are helping him out. We are contributing to his needs; helping satisfy this emptiness and this hunger that is within him. It is a good thing that we are here to give to God because if we didn't give to him he would lack was their attitude. .

Now look again at what he says; go back to verse 8.

Ps 50:8 "I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, and your burnt offerings are continually before me.

The problem is not that you are not sacrificing. Here is the problem; it is your theology of sacrifice.

Ps 50:9 "I shall take no young bull out of your house nor male goats out of your folds. Ps 50:10a "For every beast of the forest is mine,"

Do you get it Israel? Every single beast in the forest is already mine.

Ps 50:10b The cattle on a thousand hills. Ps 50:11 "I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is mine. Ps 50:12 "If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all it contains."

Now do you see the point? They are worshiping God as if he is needy, and we are here to give and help him out. How many times does the offering plate pass in conservative Bible believing churches and the theology in people's mind as they put that offering in the plate is basically the same idea. How many missionary calls are heeded with basically the same theology in mind? Helping poor God out; poor desperate, needy, hungry God. Here I am to save the day with my gift, my life, my sacrifice, my service and God says don't give it.

Ps 50:13 "Shall I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of male goats?"

Do you think that is what I am doing in your sacrificing?

Ps 50:14a "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving

What does "thanksgiving" imply in terms of the God people relationship? We are the receiver, and God is the giver. It is just the opposite of what you think God says. You think you are giving to me to help me out. Offer to me an offering of thanksgiving where you acknowledge I am the giver, and you are receiver. I am the full one; you are the empty one. I am the wise one; you are the fool. I am the one with power; you are the one who is weak.

Ps 50:14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High; Ps 50:15 "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor me."

Get the order here. I will rescue you, and you will honor me. God is the rescuer; God is the helper; God is the stronghold; God is the rock, the refuge, the provider, the protector. What am I? I am the weak needy recipient of all that God has to give to me, without which I will die.

Isaiah 40 is also picturesque in how it presents the self-sufficiency of God. These are rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions are questions whose answers are so obvious you don't have to give them.

Is 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marked off the heavens by the span, and calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance and the hills in a pair of scales?

Look at the images there. "Who do you know," asked the Lord, "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?" Think of it, the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific, the Mediterranean Sea; he measures the waters in the hollow of his hand. What picture of God does this give you? He is immense. He is big. He is powerful.

Look at the other images here. Who do you know who can mark off the heavens by the span? The span is the distance between your thumb and little finger. Light traveling at 186,000 miles per second takes 7 1/2 minutes to get here from the sun, from the nearest star besides our sun it is four years at that speed. That is the nearest star to us besides the sun; four years at 186,000 miles per second. The stars in the Milky Way Galaxy are separated by roughly 10 upwards to 100 light years from one another. In the Milky Way Galaxy there are hundreds of millions stars. That is the Milky Way Galaxy, that is the neighborhood. When you look out at a clear night outside almost everything you see are stars in the Milky Way Galaxy, just in the neighborhood. If you know where to look you can spot whole other galaxies out there that actually appear to be stars but because they are so far away all hundred million of those stars appear to us here as one speck of light. How many galaxies are there in the universe? Billions, they don't know how many. They still are finding more. They don't know how many. With the average of 100 million stars per galaxy, separated by an average distance of about 100 light years from one another. Who do you know who can mark off the heavens by the span?

Who do you know who can calculate the dust of the earth by the measure and weigh the mountains in a balance and the hills in a pair of scales? Do you know anybody big enough who can hold a pair of scales and weigh out the Rocky Mountains or the Himalayas on a pair of scales?

Obviously, the answer to the rhetorical question in verse 12 is only God. He is so big, so powerful, so great, so awesome, so immense.

In verse 13 notice the shift in the topic. The rhetorical questions continue but there is a difference emphasis.

Is 40:13 Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as his counselor has informed him? Is 40:14 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?

The answer is no one. Who has informed God? No one. Who has counseled God? No one. He doesn't need our advice. He doesn't want our advice. We have to remember that in our praying. We can cross the line of seeking wisdom from God to instructing God. There is a finger pointing up, shaking, instructing God. How dare we do that. Who do we think we are? Who do we think God is? Who has counseled the Lord? No one. You think of all the difficulties and challenges God has running this world, and he never once seeks advice. He doesn't have a council out there of advisors. He doesn't pull a committee together to talk it through or hear from them. No, he doesn't need any help. He knows everything. His wisdom is perfect, and so he doesn't need advice.

Is 40:15 Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales;

Think about those images for a moment. Talk about vivid images. The nations, get the point there, we're talking about the collective whole of humanity, all our prowess, all of our military might, all of collective wisdom, everything we have taken together is before God as a drop from a bucket. The next image is a speck of dust on the scales. When was the last time you were at the grocery store at the deli counter, and you saw this woman getting sliced turkey. He was weighing it out and just before he pushed the button to ring up the price on it, she said, "Wait, wait hold it, you have to get that speck of dust off the scale I don't want to get overcharged."

What is the point of a drop of water from a bucket and speck of dust on the scales? They are trivial; they are inconsequential. They don't make a difference. The nations, everything we have taken collectively, are as a drop from a bucket; they are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales.

Is 40:15c Behold, he lifts up the islands like fine dust. Is 40:16 Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering. Is 40:17 All the nations are as nothing before him, they are regarded by him as less than nothing and meaningless

Meaningless is either void or meaningless. It can be translated either way. This is remarkable. When God says here in verse 17 that the nations are as nothing before him, they are regarded by him as less than nothing and meaningless, he does not mean the nations mean nothing to him. It is not as though he is saying, "I could not care less about the nations." How do we know he doesn't mean that? Christ came for the nations (Rev 5); he came for people from every tribe and tongue. How do we know that he doesn't mean, I don't care about the nations? Because God (we will come to this, it is where the marvel comes in) has demonstrated from beginning to end his commitment to shower his mercy, favor, strength, renewal, salvation, and transformation upon people from every tribe, tongue and nation. Even in Isaiah 40, how does the chapter end? After going through this description of how great God is and how the nations are nothing before him, what is the point of the chapter? Trust me, look to me; wait upon me because I will give you strength. I'll give you hope; I'll provide for you all you need. Look to me, God

says. If he didn't care about the nations, if he didn't care about people, he wouldn't be pleading with them to wait upon the LORD.

So, what is the answer to the question, "What does he mean when he says all the nations are nothing before him?" They are regarded as less than nothing and meaningless. The answer to the question is not that he doesn't care about them. What is the answer to the question, what does he mean? He doesn't need them. He has just been talking in the preceding context about his power and his wisdom. Isn't it the point that the nations, taken as a collective whole, with all of their power and all of their wisdom in relation to God amount to nothing. Isn't that the point? What can you add to infinite power and infinite wisdom? The answer is nothing. How can the nations contribute to the richness of God? Answer, they can't. What can the nations add to what God possesses intrinsically? Nothing. That is what he means. So why does he care? This ought to loom huge in our thinking. This great God, so powerful and so wise, why would he care? He doesn't need me; I don't add anything to him; I don't give him anything he lacks; I can't.

Acts 17 is by far the most explicit statement. It just comes right off the page and says God is self-sufficient. No metaphors, just straight forward propositional statements from Paul. Get the significance of this. In Acts 17 Paul is in Athens and was waiting for friends to join him in Athens.

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

Athens was the religious center of the known world at that time. They prided themselves in knowing about and having represented in their city every god. It was as polytheistic as you could imagine. Archeologists have discovered that in ancient Athens at this time, the streets were lined with altars and inscriptions and little temples where people would bring offerings to the gods, all over the city.

Acts 17:22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. Acts 17:23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; Acts 17:25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

Here we have Theology 101. You don't get more basic than this in understanding God. Paul's main point is that God is self-sufficient. You can see that, everything drives toward that. The God who made the world is Lord of heaven and earth; he dwells not in temples made with hands and is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything since he gives. He is the self-sufficient reservoir of everything; everything good is in him. How does Paul establish that point?

First of all he says, "the God who made the world and all things in it." How does the affirmation of God as creator support his self-sufficiency? What is the link? How can you say that God needs anything in the creation when he has given everything in the creation? Because everything is from God, there is nothing out there that God doesn't have, that isn't from his being. The Doctrine of Creation, out of nothing, is a crucial Christian doctrine. God alone exists eternally. He creates the world out of nothing. By that theologians have meant "out of nothing else that exists." Everything here owes its existence to him. He doesn't depend on any of it for who he is, or what he has.

He is Lord of heaven and earth. How does Lordship relate to self-sufficiency? He is Lord of it; that is saying something other than he made it, and it owes its existence to him. He controls it, he rules it, he governs it, he has all of it. Thinking back to Psalm 50. You think you are bringing your goats and your cattle to me because I need what you have to give me; don't you understand the world is mine and all it contains. What could you give me that I lack, God says. The answer is nothing; he has it all. We grow with this notion that the tithe is Gods and the rest is mine. It is paying God off for what he must do, and then we live our lives the way we want to with the rest. God owns all of it. He has rights over every penny, every single bit of everything we have; it is his. He is Lord of heaven and earth, so you and I can't give him something that he doesn't already have.

The last thing he says comes at the end of verse 25;

Acts 17:25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

Notice the dual use of "all." He gives all things to all people. We depend upon him 100%. We depend upon him absolutely. He depends upon us zero. He is not served by human hands as though he needed anything.

3) DENIALS OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Let's discuss some a couple of the more pervasive views against God's self-sufficiency.

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