

The Essence of God, Part 3

In the course of our study of the Holy Spirit we have been looking at the subject of the Essence of God and what actually defines Him and His person. We have looked at seven of the attributes that make up God's Essence. They were: Sovereignty, Righteousness, Justice, Love, Omniscience, Omnipresence, and Eternal Life. We will now take a look at the last three: Omnipotence, Immutability, and Veracity.

Omnipotence

We often speak of God being omnipotent or all-powerful, implying that God is powerful enough to accomplish absolutely anything that He sets His mind to. Considering He made the heavens and the earth and created angels and man, it is easy to come to the understanding of God as capable of doing anything. But you might have at one time asked, "If that were true, why doesn't He just eradicate sin? Or prevent terrible things from happening? After all He has the power to do anything, doesn't He?"

Yes He does. Omnipotence speaks of God's unlimited power; He is unlimited in His ability. "Great is our Lord, and of great power..." (Psa. 147:5). He told Abraham He was "almighty" (Gen. 17:1). He asks the rhetorical question, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" and then he took a barren and well-passed menopause woman, Sara, and produced a child from her through Abraham (Gen. 18:14). Other passages such as Psalm 24:8; 93:1; Isaiah. 40:26; 50:2; Jeremiah. 27:5; 32:19; and Matthew 19:26 speak of this omnipotence.

The New Testament Greek word *pantokrator* *pan-tok-rat'-ore* is translated "omnipotence" only once in the Bible in Revelation 19:6. Elsewhere it is usually rendered "almighty". *Pantokrator*, like many Greek words, is made up of two other words, *pan* which means "all" and *kratos* which means "dominion, power, or strength". In the Old Testament Hebrew we often find the title El Shaddai in reference to God, which is usually rendered "the almighty God," and this title carries the same sense of strength and power as *pantokrator*.

God's power, which is like His love, is totally devoid of human props. We humans usually associate power with muscles, but God doesn't have

muscles, or even a body. His power emanates from His mind not from physical appendages.

God is mighty to save (Neh. 1:10; Heb. 7:25) and to those who believe in Christ, He makes known “what is the exceeding greatness of his power... according to the working of his mighty power” (Eph. 1:19). He is mighty to “keep” the believer (1 Pet. 1:5). “Keep” is *phroureo froo-reh'-o* and refers to a guard or garrison of a fortress. Nothing and no one, not even Satan himself, can remove us from the earth until it is the Lord’s time for us to go home. The Lord’s timing applies even in the case of human suicide. You only think you have any control over your death. You may attempt suicide, but it is God who will decide if and when you will be successful or not.

The Lord God omnipotent says to all believers, “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is there any thing too hard for me?” (Jer. 32:27). When we learn to apply this, we will respond with Job, “I know that thou can do everything...” (Job. 42:2) and we will relax in the knowledge that “with God nothing is impossible” (Luke 1:37). God’s power and authority are manifested in many ways, such as the creation of the universe (Gen. 1; Jer. 32:17). Can such power even be grasped by man’s finite mind?

God is limitless in His authority. By His power He rules and upholds all things (1 Chron. 29:11-12; Psa. 33:9; 66:7; Romans 13:1; Heb. 1:3). But as limitless as His power is, God’s power is exercised in a very controlled manner. Though He is able to do anything He wills to do, He does not will to do all He is able to do.

An external “limit” to God’s power is negative volition on the part of angels and man. (Technically this is a self-limiting action on God’s part.) Angels and man are allowed free agency, and under the permissive will of God, we are free to act under that agency. Though He could, God will not violate man’s free will. The reasons are a bit complicated and beyond this study, but it is sufficient to note here that God granted angels and man a free will, did so for a reason, and will not violate that. Both angels and man have this God-given authority to act in a manner inconsistent with His desires. But even if we do act in a manner contrary to God’s will, that doesn’t stop His plan for one second or even slow it down. God, in His omnipotence, is not hindered in the least by our contrary behavior.

God is also self-limiting in the sense that He will not do something, even though He is able to do it, if the act violates His own essence. To violate His own essence would render Him inconsistent with the qualities that qualify Him as God and thus no longer a perfect God worthy of worship. For example, we have already seen that God would never violate man's free will. But consider that God, because of His perfect righteousness, can never condone sin. His very essence requires that He deal with sin in a way that is consistent with His own righteousness, thus we have the Cross where sin was judged, rather than God simply forgiving and forgetting sins. Though He has the power and authority to simply ignore sin in His creation, His own perfect essence will not allow it. The judgment of sin at the Cross satisfies God's perfect righteousness and allows Him to provide salvation as a free gift to those who are trusting in that fact.

We believers can rest in the power of an omnipotent God, who is able to do all that He wills to do for His children, even to the point of finding a way to provide salvation to fallen man without violating His own righteousness. Of all that God has done in His omnipotence, that was by far the most difficult to accomplish. We ought to appreciate the magnitude of just what He can do, has done, and will do (if we ask) on our behalf.

Immutability

Webster's Dictionary defines "immutable" as not capable of or susceptible to change. God is immutable and not capable of change.

Ps 102:26 They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: 27 But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.

Hebrews 1:12 And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

Not only does God never change, but His published moral principles also never change. Social mores may change, but that does not affect God's moral values. Just because society now accepts certain behavior that was at one time considered wrong does not make it right under God's moral code. What was right 100 years ago or 1,000 years ago, or in eternity past is still right today, and will still be right 100 years from now or in eternity

future. What was wrong 100 or 1,000 years ago is wrong today, and will still be wrong 100 or 10,000 years from now. These unchanging moral principles are a profound reality of His immutability.

There are passages that appear to teach that God changes, but these must be understood as anthropomorphisms, which means expressing divine policy in human terms. In Genesis 6:6 it states, “it repented the LORD that he had made man.” The word repent means to have a change of mind. This would suggest that God changed His mind about man, but Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent.” Then we have in 1 Samuel 15:11 and 35, “It repenteth me that I have set up Saul as king.” Yet in verse 29 we have, “And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man that he should repent.” What gives?

God always pursues a righteous course. His attitude toward men must change according to every moral change in men. For example, God’s unchanging holiness requires Him to treat the wicked differently from the righteous. When man is righteous God must treat him according, but when man changes and becomes unrighteous, God’s perfect righteousness must adjust to that fact. That adjustment is seen in these passages through the anthropomorphic term “repent,” which suggests God is changing His mind. He is not changing His mind at all but merely expressing His displeasure with fallen and unrighteous man through the use of terms that will be understood by man.

Similarly, we see threats go unfulfilled that are explained by their conditional nature. God told Jonah He would destroy Nineveh in Jonah 3:4 but changes His mind in verse 10. Nineveh responded to Jonah’s prophetic warning and repented of their wickedness. On that basis God withheld judgment but only temporarily. Nineveh eventually fell back into their old ways and was destroyed.

God’s Word is unchangeable (Psa. 119:89; 148:6; Isa. 40:8; 1 Pet. 1:25), and His works are unchanging (Eccl. 3:14). Jesus Christ is immutable and unchanging, “the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8) and the Bible is “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).

God’s faithfulness stems from His immutability (Lam. 3:22-23). The Bible states many ways in which God is faithful in keeping His promises (Num.

3:19; 1 Kings 8:56; Titus 1:2; Heb. 10:23; 11:11). We have all been disappointed by broken promises and we have all made promises we have not kept. This is human nature. But “God is not a man that he should lie!”

God is faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9). He does not forgive because we feel sorry for our sins or promise to do better next time. He is justified in forgiving our sins because Christ already paid the price of judgment. Man is merely recognizing the wrong we have committed (sin) and claiming the solution.

He is faithful in keeping us saved.

1 Tim. 2:11 Faithful is the saying: For if we died with him, we shall also live with him: 12 if we endure, we shall also reign with him: if we shall deny him, he also will deny us: 13 if we are faithless, he abideth faithful; for he cannot deny himself.

God is resident in the believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the regenerate spirit of man is a literal child of God. To reject a believer is to reject Himself. Even if we say after we are saved, “I do not believe in Christ,” God is still faithful to us “for he cannot deny himself”. There is nothing we can say or do to lose our salvation once we believe in Jesus Christ as Savior. Since God did the saving, He does the keeping. Had we helped God in any way, we would be justified in thinking we could lose our salvation by something we might do. Salvation is a gift, and gifts are not taken back, thus you can’t even give them back.

God is faithful to deliver us from and in pressure or testing (1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). He is faithful in stabilizing and protecting the believer (2 Thess. 3:3). God’s immutability is our anchor in unstable times. God is faithful in the administration of His plan (1 Cor. 1:9). God is faithful in His provision (1 Thess. 5:24).

It is an awesome thought to consider that absolute confidence and be placed in everything God says and does; that He can be trusted to ALWAYS be faithful and never change; though we may change, He does not; though we may not be trustworthy, He is.

Veracity

Veracity simply means that God is absolute truth. God does not ever lie. This truthfulness is an expression of His perfect righteousness.

Deuteronomy 32:4 tells us He is, “a God of truth and without inequity, just and right is he”. Notice how the passage connects truthfulness with righteousness as if the two attributes are inseparable. They are!

For God to be untruthful, it would be a violation of His perfect righteousness, for if God ever lied, He would not be righteous. His perfection would be damaged by the lie. Therefore, it is impossible for God to ever tell a lie, or even a small fib. Such a failure would render Him no better than man and unworthy of worship as God.

If God is to be faithful to us, He must also be truthful with us. We must have all the facts concerning Him as well as ourselves. Therefore His veracity is manifest in His ways (Psa. 25:10; 86:15; Rev. 15:3). There is no deceit in the actions of God.

Rev 15:3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!

His veracity is manifest in His works (Psa. 33:4; 111:7-8; Dan. 4:37).

Ps 111:7 The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy;

His veracity is in His Word (2 Sam. 7:28; 1 Kgs. 17:24; Psa. 119:142, 115; 138:2; John 17:17; 2 Cor 6:7; Eph. 1:13).

2 Sam 7:28 And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant.

The sum total of divine veracity is bound up in the Canon of Scripture. Before the Bible was written, God’s veracity was manifest in various ways: He spoke verbally in Gen. 17:1-2. He sent angels to teach. He used prophets, priests and other communicators. But now the Canon of Scripture is completed, God speaks only through His Word. We do not receive revelation direct from God or even through angels in this dispensation. There is no need, as God has revealed His complete plan in

the Canon of Scripture. Before the Canon of Scripture was completed with the penning and distribution of the last book of the Bible, Revelation, God often spoke directly to man to make His will and plan known. The Book of Revelation was completed about 90 – 95 AD and completely distributed throughout the Church within a few years. Direct revelation was then no longer necessary. We see a prophecy of this in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10.

1 Cor 13:8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

The passage is speaking of spiritual gifts. The reference to love is to the Fruit of the Spirit, of which love is the first of nine fruits produced by the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) in a “walking” believer (Gal 5:16). We are called to love our neighbors and it is with this love, God’s own, with which we are to do that.

The passage goes on to say some spiritual gifts will cease because their purpose will have been served, which was mainly to fill in until the canon of Scripture was completed. How do we know that? That statement in verse 10 “but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away”. That word “perfect” refers to the completed Canon of Scripture. Some argue it refers to Christ and His return at the Second Advent, and these special spiritual gifts mentioned, like tongues, are still active today. The problem is the word “perfect” is in the neuter gender and not masculine, which it would be if it were referred to Christ returning. The “perfect” is a thing and not a person, and can only be referring to the completed canon, which would make sense. These special edification gifts would not be needed once God’s revelation is codified as it is in our Bible.

There is one more aspect of God’s veracity we must consider. The future of Israel depends on the truthfulness of God. God has made certain promises to Israel. We call these promises “covenants”. As we have seen in previous studies, there are two kinds of covenants. The first is called a “conditional covenant”. In a conditional covenant, both parties are obligated. God agrees to deliver something to man, but man is obliged to give something to God in order to receive the promised blessing. A good example of a conditional covenant is the Mosaic Covenant, commonly called “the Law”. Under the Mosaic Covenant God made an agreement

with Israel. As part of that agreement God gave Israel a code of conduct that spelled out moral, social, and spiritual demands on Israel. The nation, believer and unbeliever alike, was under obligation to “keep” the Law and be found “blameless” under its provisions. To be found blameless under the covenant terms, when Israelites sinned, they were obliged to make animal sacrifices at the Temple as an atonement for their sins. If Israel met these terms and conditions, they would be declared “judicially blameless” and blessed individually and as a nation. This is spelled out in detail in Deuteronomy 28.

A conditional covenant also has a flip side. If Israel did not meet the terms of the covenant, that is they were not found “blameless” under the covenant’s terms and conditions, they would receive discipline. This discipline potentially could extend all the way to the point of the destruction of the nation. This is also found in Deuteronomy 28.

Simply put: If Israel kept the Law they were greatly blessed. If they failed to keep the Law, they were severely disciplined. And there were times when Israel met the terms of the covenant and were blessed, and there were times when they did not and were disciplined, disciplined to the point of being destroyed as a nation. A conditional covenant is also called a “works covenant,” because all blessing is earned and so is all discipline, for that matter.

The other form of covenant is what is called an “unconditional covenant”. Under an unconditional covenant only one party is under obligation, in this application God. God has made several unconditional covenants with Israel. Among them are the Abrahamic Covenant, Palestinian Covenant (also called the “Land Grant Covenant”), Davidic Covenant, and New Covenant to Israel. These are all explained in great detail in our recent study of the Law of Moses.

With an unconditional covenant, Israel has no obligations to meet in order to qualify to receive the blessings promised under these covenants. In other words, God intends to deliver the blessings no matter what Israel does. All Israel needs to do to receive the promised blessings of these four unconditional covenants is to “show up” when they are distributed. Therein lies the rub. (I believe Shakespeare wrote that.)

You do realize that God made these promises thousands of years ago and has not yet delivered on them? Consider what might happen if God did not deliver on these promises? What if God was unable to deliver all or even part of what He promised? If you will recall the beginning of this lesson, we established the fact that God's veracity is inextricably connected to His righteousness. If God cannot deliver on the unconditional covenants, that renders Him a liar and thus unrighteous, and thus unfit to sit in judgment on anyone. And there is "one" for whom this is a very important point.

I refer to Satan.

Satan has been judged and awaits sentencing (John 16:11). If he can prevent God from delivering on these four covenants to Israel, then God will be a liar and unrighteous and unfit to sit in judgment on Satan. And Satan gets off from his punishment. Satan plans to see that God does not deliver on these covenants, and he plans to do so by destroying Israel, so that not one single Jew will be alive when God distributes the blessings promised. If there are no Jews alive to receive the promised blessings, there can be no distribution of the covenant promises. Then God is a liar.

This, my beloved, is the underlying cause for ALL anti-Semitism in the world. It is all part of a plan by Satan to build enmity between Gentiles and Jews to make their destruction easier when the time comes. The Inquisition, the Nazis, the problems in the Middle East today are just warm-ups for what is coming during the Tribulation. That is when Satan will make one last bid to destroy Israel.

In John 8:44 Jesus says Satan "was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies."

It is impossible for God to lie. In His Word, His works, and His ways are absolute truth without deceit or deception, and He will deliver on His promises.

The Essence of God – Summary

In the course of our study, we have looked at the essence of God and gotten just a little better understanding of His person and character. To understand what makes God "tick" helps us understand how He must and

will relate to mankind, and more importantly how He must and will deal with sin. There can be no compromises in these areas. God's own essence demands it.

As a human being there are things that you find personally repugnant that you say you could never do. Conversely, there are certain behaviors that you might consider noble and right. Even though all this may be based on divine standards, this is human righteousness (Minus-R). Maybe you really "mean it" and you are determined to do or not to do these things, and cannot even imagine yourself failing in that regard. In a limited way this is part of your character and helps define who and what you are as a person. The same is true for God only infinitely more so. For you, being human is subject to change and compromise if enough pressure is applied. Yes, if enough pressure is applied, most could be made to do even that which completely repels them. But no amount of pressure or outside influence can cause God to EVER change His character. Man must, therefore, learn to adjust to His character, for the only adjustment God will make to us is through His justice, and that has the potential for pain. What the righteousness of God approves, the justice of God blesses, but what the righteousness of God condemns, the justice of God disciplines. While this may sound like God changing His mind, it is merely His perfect righteousness adjusting His response to imperfect man. So it behooves man to be in alignment with the character of God. Understanding God's character then becomes of paramount importance.

As we close our study of the essence of God, perhaps a short review of what we have learned would be in order. We have listed ten attributes that comprise the essence of God. Arguably we could list even more (some expositors do), and we could arrange them differently (some expositors do that). But the ten we have covered here do a pretty good job of defining God's person and character, and give us some insight into how His very own essence compels Him to deal with His creation.

- 1) Sovereignty - He is sovereign over all, there is none higher. God claims dominion over all that He has created. Though Satan has been granted temporary dominion over earth as its ruler, even here God retains absolute sovereignty and only *allows* Satan dominion. Ultimately fallen man and corrupted earth will be brought back into the complete dominion of God after the Second Advent.

- 2) Righteousness - He has perfect righteousness that remains uncompromised by man. Furthermore, God's work in saving mankind does not compromise His righteousness. God found a way through the work of Christ on the Cross to redeem fallen man, at least those who partake of the free gift of salvation through trust in what Christ did on the Cross. And grace is the only way. Man could not ever earn or deserve it. For God to allow imperfect man to earn his salvation, it would compromise His perfect righteousness.
- 3) Justice - His perfect righteousness is administered through His perfect justice. What righteousness approves, justice blesses. What righteousness condemns, justice disciplines. God approves His own righteousness imputed to born again believers. His justice looks at believers in possession of the very righteousness of Christ and can freely bless it. But righteousness also looks at human behavior that it is not aligned with God's standard, and the justice of God is compelled to discipline it, just like any loving father would do.
- 4) Love - God's love is different from human love. Human love depends on the lovability of the object of that love. We call this "personal love". God's love depends on His own integrity. That is how He is able to love those in which there is no merit to love. We call this "impersonal love". He is love, and that perfect love is produced in us by the Holy Spirit as part of the Fruit of the Spirit. We humans do not ever generate a form of love that comes close to God's perfect love, which is based on His integrity, but believers can have that perfect love produced in them by the Spirit and demonstrated out through them to their fellow man. "Love thy neighbor as thyself."
- 5) Eternal Life - He is eternal life. There never was a time he did not exist, and there never will be a time when He does not exist. God's eternal life is imputed to the believer. And we will share that eternal life with God in eternity. The fallen who reject the free gift of salvation through faith in Christ face an eternal existence separated from God in eternal torment.
- 6) Omniscience - He is "all knowing." He knows all things: the actual and the possible all the way into infinity. Therefore, His knowledge is infinite. Part of His omniscience is His foreknowledge, which is God's

knowledge restricted to the actual only. He knew every trial you would ever face and made provision for it in eternity past.

- 7) Omnipotence – God is all powerful. He has the power to do anything He wants to do, but will do nothing that would violate His own essence. In that sense, God is self-limiting. His actions can be governed by His own essence, for God cannot and will not ever violate His own essence.
- 8) Omnipresence – God is everywhere: imminent and transcendent. There is no place you can run and hide from God. He knows even your inner most thoughts.
- 9) Immutability – God does not change. He is the same today as He was in eternity past, and will be the same in eternity future. From this stability comes His faithfulness. You can count on God to never change.
- 10) Veracity – God cannot lie or deceive. It would be a violation of His righteousness to ever even tell a fib. If God said it, you can be sure it will transpire exactly as He said it would happen.

God's essence defines how He will react in given situations. With an understanding of His essence, we can gauge His reactions to our actions and adapt to bring our lives into alignment with His will.

Although these definitions of His essence are a textbook look at God, we should take this understanding and attempt to apply it to our lives and our continued study of Bible doctrine. God has revealed Himself to mankind through His Word. He wants us to understand Him and His character. Furthermore, God has revealed His plan for mankind in His Word. It is all right there for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, everything from the beginning to the end. If we want to know God and understand Him, it can be done.