

## The Essence of God Part 2

We have looked at the first four attributes that make up the essence of God, namely: Sovereignty, Righteousness, Justice and Love.

We have seen that God is completely sovereign over everything. There is none higher. We saw that God's righteousness is complete and perfect. We refer to it as "Plus-R". By comparison, man's righteousness (Minus-R) is at best relative, meaning the righteousness of one person is better or worse than that of another, but neither is even close to perfect. God's perfect righteousness is analogous to a system of laws. His righteousness is administered by His perfect justice. What righteous demands, justice executes. God's righteousness and His justice make up His integrity or holiness.

We then looked at God's attribute of Love and we saw that God's love is very different from man's love. Human love is based on the lovability of the object of that love. We love someone because there is something about them that we find lovable. God's love is very different. He certainly cannot love man on the basis of fallen man's merit. Nothing that man is or does can ever measure up to God's perfect standard. God loves "the world" on the basis of His own personal integrity, in other words, His holiness — His perfect righteousness and perfect justice. We call this love His "impersonal love". God demonstrates impersonal love to the entire human race in that Christ died for us (John 3:16).

Then we saw that God does demonstrate a form of divine love that in some respects resembles human love, in that it is based on the merit of the object. This second form of love based on merit in the object is called God's "personal love". It is directed to a select set of individuals, that being born again believers. This is so because born again believers are in the possession of the very righteousness of God imputed to them at salvation. God loves His own righteousness and thus loves those who are in possession of it.

We also saw that, contrary to what many believe, God's point of contact with man is not His love. Rather, it is His justice. What His righteousness demands, His justice executes. God's righteousness demands that He condemn sin. God's perfect righteousness will allow no other option. To do so would compromise His perfect righteousness. And if His righteousness

were ever compromised, He would no longer be perfect. Thus, God cannot ever “look the other way” or “wink” at sinfulness. However, he may defer judgment because of His patience and mercy, BUT eventually God is compelled to judge sin and condemn it.

That brings us up to date.

### **Eternal Life**

In Exodus 3:14 when asked for a name by Moses, God said to Moses “I am that I am”. These words have been translated many ways. The Vulgate translates it “I am who I am”. The Arabic paraphrases it “The Eternal”. The Targum of Jonathan and the Jerusalem Targum paraphrase the words thus: “He who spake, and the world was; who spake, and all things existed.”

In the Hebrew it is in the future tense and should be literally translated, “I will be what I will be.” Some have supposed that God simply intended to inform Moses, that what he had been to his fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he would be to him and the Israelites; and that he would perform the promises he had made to his fathers. It is difficult to put a meaning on the words; they seem intended to point out the eternity and self-existence of God.

The term signifies the reality of his being; whereas idols are nothings (1 Co. 8:4), all their divinity is only in the fancies and opinions of men. But God is more than that.

The term also speaks of the eternity, and unchangeableness of His being. Whereas all other beings once were not, and, if He please, they shall be no more; and all their being was derived from Him, and wholly depends upon Him; and he only is by and from Himself.

It speaks of the constancy and certainty of His nature, and will, and word. God is saying, “I am the same that ever I was; the same who made the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and am now come to perform them; who, as I can do what I please, so I will do what I have said.” The future tense in the Hebrew comprehends all times, past, present, and future, to signify that all times are alike to God, and all are present to Him.

It probably also alludes to the mystery of Christ's incarnation. "I shall be what I shall be" — the God-man; and I who now come in an invisible, though glorious, manner to deliver you from this temporal bondage, shall in due time come visibly, and by incarnation, to save you and all my people from a far worse slavery and misery, even from your sins, and from wrath to come. In John 8:58 Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

"I am what I am." The name speaks of His self-existence, self-sufficiency, all-sufficiency, an inexhaustible fountain of being, and that He is eternal and unchangeable. He existed in eternity past and will exist forever. There never was a time when He did not exist, and there never will be a time when He does not exist. "I will be what I will be."

**Psa. 90:2** Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

**Deut. 32:40** For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever

**Job 36:26** Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out.

**Ps. 9:7** But the LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment.

**Ps. 102:27** But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end

Technically speaking there is a difference between "eternal life" which God possesses and "everlasting life" which is available to man (John 3:16). Eternal life has no beginning and no ending. There never was a time when it did not exist and there never will be a time when it does not exist.

Everlasting life does have a beginning but no ending. There was a time when it did not exist, but once created it is "everlasting," meaning it will never cease to exist. This applies to both the saved and the unsaved of mankind. For both the believer and the unbeliever eternity is everlasting. Once created, the soul does not pass out of existence. But the unbeliever who fails to make his decision for Jesus Christ in time will suffer everlasting punishment and regret (Matt. 24:51; 25; 46a). The believer has

the assurance of everlasting life and joy in the presence of the Eternal God (Matt. 25:46b) and can rest in the knowledge that in this life “the eternal God is his refuge” (Deut. 33:27).

Consider these eternal life verses:

**John 3:16** For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

**John 10:28** And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

**1 John 5:11** And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Believers receive God’s eternal life at the moment of salvation, “and this life is in his Son”. As born again believers we receive the same eternal life as found in Christ, and that life assures us of an eternal relationship with the Son, not just the promise of receiving it in the future but the believer is in possession of that life at the moment of salvation.

**John 5:24** Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

In the original language, Greek, “has eternal life” implies the present possession of eternal life with continuing results, that is the believer has it now and will be in possession of eternal life in the future. Note that such a person does not come under divine judgment but has passed (it is an accomplished fact) from spiritual death into eternal life with God.

God is eternal. There never was a time when He did not exist, and there will never be a time when He does not exist. Though in the possession of “everlasting life” at birth, sometimes called “soul life,” the believer comes into the possession of God’s eternal life at salvation, and once in possession of such has it forever.

## Omniscience

This English word, omniscience, is derived from two Latin words: *omnis*, meaning “all,” and *sciens*, which means “knowing” — “all knowing.” God knows all things, He is all-knowledge; “...for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed” (1 Sam. 2:3). “Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect knowledge?” (Job 37:16) See also Job 26:6; 31:4’ 34:21; 42:2b; Psa. 139:1-6, 12; 147:4; Jer. 16:17; Ezek. 11:5; Matt. 10:29-30; Heb 4:13.

Man is said to have an intellect. The corresponding feature in God is His omniscience. But there is a world of difference between the two! Intellect in man is hardly more than a capacity or readiness to acquire knowledge. Omniscience in God is more than a readiness to acquire knowledge; it is the possession of all possible knowledge, leaving absolutely nothing to be learned or newly understood. Furthermore, omniscience comprehends all things at once—things past, things present, things future. God knows history, He knows what is happening in the present time, but He also knows with unwavering certainty what will eventually come to pass. God knows the future before it happens.

The Bible is full of prophecy, and only about half of it has come to pass. And it came to pass exactly as prophesied. If only half has yet happened, that means the other half is yet future and is thus unfulfilled. And if the first half happened exactly as prophesied, it is reasonable to assume the other half will also. Want to know the future? Read the Bible and it will tell you. “Oh, but that is way off in the future,” you say. Wanna bet? It is entirely possible that we are witnesses to the unfolding of prophetic events right now. But that is another series of lessons....

Not only does the omniscience of God include the actual past, present, and future, but it also comprehends what is merely possible as well, and does so all the way into eternity! That is called the “counterfactuals”.

Let me use a finite example to demonstrate the infinite potential of this knowledge we call omniscience: As humans we know what color shirt we have on at this moment. That is knowledge in the present time. A sequence of events and decisions led to you wearing that shirt. That is the knowledge relating to the past. What you may not know at this time is the fact that you have on that shirt today will result in a long series of future ramifications that will extend all the way to the end of time. The fact that

you have a particular shirt on today means you will likely not wear it tomorrow, which means you may wear another color instead. And today's dirty shirt will go in the wash, and someone will spill bleach on it and ruin it. Then you have to replace it, but to do so means you will spend money on a new shirt that you would have spent on something else, so instead of going to the movies in two days, you will go to the store and buy a new shirt, and so on. Do you see how something as simple as a shirt color can have far reaching consequences?

That is complicated enough, but consider this: What if you had worn another color shirt, or worn it a second day without washing, or didn't spill bleach on it, or didn't bother to replace it and went to the movies anyway? Get the point? Not only is there a series of events that actually did happen with actual results, but there is an infinite number of possible counterfactual variations that did not, is not, or will not happen. And this is just for a shirt color!

God not only comprehends what actually did happen, what actually is happening, and what will ultimately result from these events, but He also understands and knows ALL the possible variations that could have happened, would be happening and might have resulted. And He knows all this stuff for EVERYTHING! That is a lot of comprehending! That is omniscience.

While God may understand all this in the context of time, that things happen in a sequence of events past, present, and future, but in His mind everything, actual and possible, is comprehended simultaneously. To God the things of the past are as real as those present, and things future are as real as those past. God sees all His program of events in their unified whole. In His omniscience, God sees everything—past, present, and future—with equal clarity and reality. The knowledge of one thing does not, in the mind of God, come before another. One act of knowledge does not beget another. God does not reason through a series of events like man does, one event resulting in another. God comprehends all events in the time sequence at once.

(For those of us old enough to understand its meaning, about now we might be thinking, "Far out, man!")

God's knowledge is not related to or limited by time. Our knowledge is based on time. We say hindsight has 20/20 vision, because it is clearer than foresight. We can look back and evaluate things that have happened in the past, see our failures, and hopefully learn from them. But for the future, we can only speculate and sometimes even make fairly accurate guesses. But none of us has 20/20 foresight. We do not know with absolute certainty what will happen tomorrow. We are slaves to time, and we are limited by time; God's knowledge is superimposed over time.

In regard to events themselves, one thing is before another, one year before another, one act of knowledge before another, one generation of man before another, one is the cause and the other is the effect. In man's mind there is such a succession, and God knows there will be a succession, but there is no such order in God's knowledge. He knows all these successions by one glance, without any succession of knowledge in Himself. God didn't sit there in eternity past and dream all this up going from angels, Satan, fall, creation of man, man's fall, provisions for redemption, the Cross, etc. God knew all this simultaneously in eternity past and not only that, He always knew it. There never was a time when He did not know it.

Omniscience is not like the intellect of man, which is the ability to acquire knowledge, but is the actual possession of knowledge, all of it, everything that can be comprehended, past present, and future, the actual as well as the merely possible.

God's omniscience includes not only what is past and present, but it also comprehends all that is future, which is called the foreknowledge of God. Unlike omniscience, which includes the possible as well as the actual, foreknowledge is restricted to the actual and excludes the merely possible. The word comes from the Greek *proginosko prog-in-occe'-ko*; means to know something beforehand. *Pro* is before, in front of or prior and *gonosko* —to know. Foreknowledge is far more than just a knowledge of future events or prescience or preknowledge of future events. Unlike simple prescience, foreknowledge is that which God Himself proposes to bring to pass. As such, foreknowledge is related to foreordination in that it is part of the divine decree of God.

In Job we have a reference to God's "perfect knowledge" (Job 37:16). The Hebrew word for perfect knowledge - *tamiym taw-meem* - without

blemish, complete, full, perfect. By definition then, God's foreknowledge is far more than just a knowledge of your existence and what you will do with your life. It implies an intimate knowledge of you and your every thought and action. God foreknows the actions of all moral agents. He knows what decisions you will make, and what actions will result from those decisions.

This does not preclude the free will of man. This divine foreknowledge in and of itself implies no element of necessity or determination, though it does imply certainty. Foreknowledge does not mean that something has to happen, only that it is absolutely certain that it will happen. It is what God proposes to happen, and with that comes an extreme degree of certainty.

The question of free will in the moral agent arises when it is asked whether man has freedom to act other than as God foreknew he will act. The answer is that the human will is indeed capable of electing the opposite course of that which was foreknown, but he will not do so. If he did, what he did do would be that which was foreknown. Divine foreknowledge does not coerce; it merely knows what human choice and action will be.

This does not imply that God is merely acting on preknown human decisions. That is a violation of the sovereignty of God. For God to base His plan on the foibles of human depravity would be risky in the extreme. In other words, God does not merely look into the future to see what you will do and decree it to happen as foreseen. That puts His plan wholly in your hands, and it ain't going to happen that way! God in His sovereignty will decide what will happen as part of His plan, but He does it without violating your free will. Yes, even though what decision you make was a sovereign decision of God in eternity past your free will is still fully functioning. Yet God determines the course of your life, actually decrees it to happen exactly as He foreknew it. Confused?

Perhaps this will help you understand. God's knowledge of you is so intimate and so detailed, that He is able to predict, with absolute certainty, what your actions will be when faced with any given circumstance that might be placed in your path. This is more than just a simple and shallow understanding of what your decisions will be. This is a deep and intimate understanding of your soul and how it reacts to anything. With this understanding as foreknowledge, God is able to decree precisely what will come to pass, because God is able to orchestrate events in our lives that ensures without any doubt what the consequences will be.



**Romans 8:28** And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Admittedly, this is a very complicated subject. Well, brace yourself, because it will get worse.

Part of the omniscience of God is His foreknowledge, which is that part that deals exclusively with what is actual and excludes the merely possible. God's foreknowledge manifests itself in the divine decree of God. The term is singular even though it encompasses many decrees.

Since foreknowledge is what God actually proposes to bring to pass, it is part of the divine decree. The whole order of events from the smallest detail to the greatest operates under the determining decree of God. What is decreed is said to be foreordained.

Foreordination takes what is foreknown and determined and makes it certain. Foreordination then is part of the divine decree, and it is related to the saved, the unsaved, and also all events. Foreordination includes all that WILL happen concerning a person's life, whether he is a believer or an unbeliever. It takes what God foreknows and decrees it to happen exactly as foreknown.

Predestination is that part of foreordination that is related ONLY to the believer and his salvation and ultimate glorification. Nowhere in Scripture is it ever suggested that the unbeliever is predestined to his lost state. In fact it is said we are all lost, but some are predestined to election. Predestination means to "mark off" and as such is related conceptually to sanctification, which means to set aside as God's own.

There are two main theological views on this subject of God's foreknowledge and divine decree, which I will attempt to explain briefly.

First there is what is called the Arminian view, and this position holds that God decrees ONLY what He foreknows. In other words, God must first look into the future and determine what decisions man will make and then decrees those events to happen. As you can see, this position causes God to be dependent upon man and what decision man will make. It renders God's sovereignty as having no part in the process, and that God really has no say but is merely reacting to man. Does this sound like something God would do? If God had to base His divine decrees on some future act of man, that degrades God and dishonors Him. God's sovereign purpose will never be dependent on secondary causes. It is God's sovereign will that will be done, not man's, thus the Arminian view is flawed.

On the other hand we have the Calvinist position, which contends that God foreknows ONLY because He has first decreed it. That is nothing can be foreknown as certain, unless God first makes it certain by decree. This position places ALL of the responsibility on God and His sovereignty. This also completely relieves man of any responsibility for his own actions and turns man into a mindless robot with no free will; thus the Calvinist view is also flawed.

It is obvious that neither of these positions can be correct. The truth lies somewhere in between. Foreknowledge and the divine decree are not one dependent upon the other, as the Arminians and Calvinists would argue, rather they are dependent upon each other as interdependent actions of God's will. Neither precedes the other. God can neither decree what He does not foreknow, nor can He foreknow what He does not decree.

Another "far out, man" moment? Let's look at an example of how this can work as recorded in Scripture.

One thousand years before Christ was crucified it was predicted and recorded in the Psalms exactly what certain men would do at the Cross of Christ. Their exact words were recorded first in Ps 22:8 where David, as a type of Christ, is mocked.

**Ps 22:8** "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

Let's look at the scene at the cross in Matthew where the scribes and Pharisees mock Jesus.

**Mat 27:43** He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him ...

And as predicted they cast lots for His garments in Ps 22:18.

**Ps 22:18** they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

And that is what they did one thousand years later at the Cross as recorded by John.

**Jo 19:24** so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” So the soldiers did these things,

Within their own experience, these men did precisely what they freely chose to do; yet they said and did only what had been divinely foreknown and decreed (Acts 2:23). The divine decree takes what is foreknown and makes it certain. These men did not become mindless robots; they acted and said what they said of their own free wills, but the divine decree foreordained it to happen as recorded in Psalms one thousand years before the action took place.

Another part of omniscience is divine wisdom. This implies correct judgment and the right use of knowledge. God’s wisdom so far transcends that of all other beings, that the Scriptures declare Him to be the “only wise God” (Jude 1:25; 1 Tim. 1:17). His wisdom is on display in the vast complex universe, but most of all, His divine wisdom is displayed in His plan for redemption. Here God has solved the greatest of all problems, namely, how He could be just and at the same time be the justifier of sinners.

God has a plan sovereignly laid out in eternity past. God proposes to accomplish something through this plan, and man, with his free will, is a part of that process. His plan will proceed exactly as He has planned with or without the willful cooperation of mankind in general or man individually. With His infinite wisdom and intimate understanding of man, God is able to orchestrate events in our lives that will bring us to the necessary actions that will support His divine plan in every detail. It is through this

orchestration of events, His intimate understanding of our individual souls and how we will react to circumstances, that God can predict with absolute certainty what our decisions will be and what actions we will take. And we make these decisions and take these actions completely of our own free will.

Omniscience is the knowledge of God as He sees all that is knowable, including all possible possibilities and their implications throughout eternity.

Foreknowledge is the knowledge of God limited to the actual, excluding the possible.

From the foreknowledge of God comes the divine decree, making what was foreknown happen exactly as foreknown.

Through God's control of "all things" (Romans 8:28) He is able to predict and sovereignly decree all human actions without violating man's free will. What God foreknows is absolutely certain to happen.

## **Omnipresence**

Omnipresence is not a word found in the Bible, but it is a concept expressed in many verses of Scripture. The term describes the being of God. He is said to be ever present. Simply put, God is everywhere and can be in all places at the same time.

"Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? Saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth...? (Jer. 23:24). God is not limited to time as we humans are. For God the future is as perspicuous as the past or present. For man nearness is measured in miles, inches or feet, but for God distance has no measurement, because distance does not, in effect, exist. Being infinite, God is not constrained by space.

He is both imminent (John 14:23) and transcendent (Acts 17:24). That is He is both near and far, well beyond human understanding of the limitations of space. This explains such phrases as "the heavens cannot contain thee" (1 Kings 8:27), and "heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool" (Isa. 66:1). In other words, He is both in heaven and on earth simultaneously.

You might be thinking if Jesus was God, how could he be restricted to just the earth? Deity cannot reduce itself to one place, therefore, He had to become true humanity. What was omnipresent and infinite had to become finite. What knew no restrictions of time and space had to be restricted by time and space. When Jesus went to the Cross, He did not bear our sins in His divine essence. He did not bear our sins in His deity, which cannot be limited to the one place called the Cross. Jesus bore our sins “in His own body” (1 Peter 2:24).

The humanity of Christ, born of a woman, and flesh and blood just like the rest of us, was qualified in a physical sense to represent man in judgment, because He was indeed a flesh and blood man. Fallen man could not represent himself, because none of us are qualified spiritually, being defiled by sin. The one who knew no sin was made sin for us. Jesus in His perfect and sinless humanity was the only man ever qualified to pay the penalty for sin. As a man Jesus was limited by time and space. It was this fact that made it impossible for Jesus to go to the Cross as God.

One way to define omnipresence is to establish what it is not, and omniscience is not pantheism. Pantheism (pan – all, theism – god) means God is all things. This false belief system is held by the New Age movement, Hindus and many Buddhists, also Christian Science, Unity, and Scientology. It stresses that God is in all things, such as a beautiful sunset, a humming bird, or a rose blooming. God does not exist as a separate being, but rather exists in creation as an integral part of it. God and the world are one. Pantheists attempt to turn the creator into the created.

Pantheists usually believe in reincarnation and the soul leaves one mortal body at death and enters another to work off karma. Usually the goal is to leave the body and eventually merge with God in what is called Nirvana, which means loss of identity. As for reincarnation the Bible tells us, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Sorry, but you get just one “trip” through this life, so get it right the first time.

While pantheism rejects the person of God and makes Him into the objects of His own creation, omnipresence recognizes that God is a person but allows that God can and is everywhere, and though His work is

seen in a beautiful sunset, a bird, or a rose. God is not manifested as those things.

It should be a sobering thought for the unbeliever to realize that he cannot escape the presence of God (Psa. 139:7; Prov. 15:3). No matter what you do or where you do it, God is completely aware of every detail, because He is right there watching. You can run, but you can't hide!

For believers it is comforting to know that God will never leave them nor forsake them (Heb. 13:5; Psa. 23:6; 139:8-10). There is never a moment in our lives when He is not near us (omnipresence) or we are not in His thoughts (omniscience). I do not care how terrible the situation or how remote the location of the disaster, God is aware of it and actually present. And He can and will supply support if we want it.

No other being can claim omnipresence, not angels, demons or even Satan. How do we know? Because the Scriptures tells us Satan will eventually be imprisoned in the abyss and after that the Lake of Fire. If he were omnipresent such would not be possible. Only God can claim this attribute.

Next class we will continue with our study of the Essence of God as part of our understanding of the Holy Spirit.