

I Am That I Am

The Mode of God's Being

In one of the oldest books in the Bible the questions are recorded, ***“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?”*** (Job 11:7,8). Before Infinitude, finite beings necessarily stand confounded. Nevertheless for the genuine seeker there are numerous encouragements to search after the knowledge of ***“the Almighty”***. For God, having made man in His own image, desires to be known by man and has manifested Himself in the manner which His perfect wisdom has determined to be the best for the accomplishment of His purpose. Moreover His Holy Spirit searches ***“the deep things of God”*** and reveals them to those who are humble enough to learn in dependence upon Himself (1Cor. 2:9-15). Hence God may be known according to the revelation which He has given of Himself (Deut. 29:29). Such knowledge is not only desirable and satisfying; it is essential to the creature’s welfare,

both presently and eternally: even as ignorance of God, in the light of divine revelation, is the sad evidence of moral corruption and perversity. See, for example, John 17:3; Gal. 4:8,9; 2Thess. 1:7,8; 2Pet. 1:2,3. While such Scriptures would refer particularly to a personal acquaintanceship with God, yet it is requisite that we first know about God, i.e. have some knowledge of who and what He is. To this end we would seek to discover something of His attributes as revealed in His Word.

Strictly speaking the attributes of God are not separable; together they form one indivisible Perfection. Since, however, they indicate various aspects of that Perfection, to that extent they are distinguishable. Generally they are regarded as forming two groups. the natural and the moral attributes. The former indicate the nature or mode of God's Being, the latter the qualities of His Person, what would correspond in man to personal character. We wish to consider presently the natural attributes of God, the mode of His Being.

The Lord Jesus Christ taught that **"God is Spirit"** (John 4:24). He has no material form as we have. Any reference to such features as "face", "eyes", "hands", "feet", etc., in relation to God are metaphorical only, a figure of speech known as anthropomorphism, the attributing of human form to God. They are accommodations to the limits of our understandings, expressions of divine realities in human terms. Still, we do realise that spirit beings possess powers of which our physical faculties are faint reflections. The rich man in hell who had left the body, could see, hear, and feel etc., and we read of his eyes and his tongue; for he had in the unclothed state faculties corresponding to these physical members and their functions (Luke 16:19 ff.).

Because God is Spirit, having no material form, He is invisible to physical sight (Col. 1:15; 1Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27). This, however, is the negative aspect of the

truth; the positive is less easily stated. Perhaps it is more readily understood in comparison with ourselves. We have a spirit, but all that belongs to us because we possess a spirit, consciousness, knowledge, emotion (in its higher aspects), will, morality etc., is His essentially and without the restriction of physical limitations, because He not merely has a spirit, He is Spirit. Other beings are spirit, e.g. angels (Heb. 1:7), but as this verse reminds us they are creatures, whereas God is both absolute and infinite.

When we speak of God as absolute, we mean that He is eternal and self-existent, that His Being is underived and that He is independent of everything outside of Himself for His continuance. He is what He is just because it is His essential nature so to be, and He does what He does just because He wills so to do, and not because He is forced to the deed, nor because He must account to any for His doings. When we say that He is infinite, we mean that there are no limits to any of His attributes: He knows everything, is everywhere, and can do anything without restriction. Nothing is impossible to Him, save in the sense of moral impossibilities, which would conflict with the perfections of His nature (e.g. Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

Firstly, then, God is eternal. He is **"the Eternal God"** whose claim is **"I live for ever"** (Deut. 33:27; 32:40). Our tribute is, **"From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God"** (Psa. 90:2). See also e.g. Psa. 93:2; Hab. 1:12; 1Tim. 1:17. He is the great Source **"from whom are all things"**, and the great End **"to whom are all things"** but He Himself knows neither beginning nor end (Rom. 11:36; 1Cor. 8:6; Heb. 2:10; Rev. 1:8).

Since He was before all else came into being, obviously His Being is independent of all else; He is self-existent. He can need nothing, and He is dependent upon and indebted to no-one. Rather does all depend upon Him and stand in His debt (Job 41:11; Psa. 104:27-31; Acts 17:24,25).

Not only is His Being timeless, it is changeless. Since God is perfect He cannot change: He can neither improve nor deteriorate. His nature, His Person, and His purpose are immutable. See, for example, Psalm 102:24-27; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17.

Some of the most important names and designations of God embrace the last three attributes. The unique and incommunicable name of Jehovah is derived from the Hebrew verb "to be". Being taken from the imperfect or continuous tense, it signifies One who exists as an essential fact, i.e. One whose Being is eternal, absolute and unchangeable. Precisely the same idea is conveyed in the manner of God's revelation to Moses. **"I AM THAT I AM"** (Exod. 3:13,14). One of the simplest yet most profound of Jehovah's claims, easy to comprehend, yet almost impossible to expound, is the expression, **"I AM HE"**. By this means is spelled out Jehovah's unique Being, timeless, self-sufficient, incomparable and changeless. See Deut. 32:39; Psa. 102:27 (**"Thou art the same"** is literally **"Thou art HE"**); Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 48:12.

One great Hebraist has said of this expression, that it is 'since Deut. 32:39 the fundamental sentence of the Old Testament creed', and that it presents 'the absolute Ego, without limitations on His freedom; as the Being who is immanent in history and at the same time transcends it; as He who is Lord of His absolute Being and in the revelation of it purely self-determined; as the Eternal and all-conditioning One who is Himself unconditioned'. Such a God is revealed in Scripture as omnipotent, i.e. all-powerful. His name is **"the Almighty"** (Exod. 6:3; 2Cor. 6:18; Rev. 11:17). He can **"do every thing"** (Job 42:2); **"there is nothing too hard"** for Him (Jer. 32:17), for **"with God all things are possible"** (Mark 10:27).

The simplest Hebrew name of God is **"El"**, which means "might" or "power". Sometimes it is linked with **"Shaddai"**, "strength" or "sufficiency", and translated **"God Almighty"** (Gen. 35:11).

God is also omniscient, all-knowing. ***“The LORD is a God of knowledge”*** (1Sam. 2:3): He ***“knoweth all things”*** (1John 3:20). From the heights of heaven to the depths of hell nothing escapes His cognisance (Job 26:6; Prov. 15:11). The innermost secrets of the heart are known to Him (Psa. 44:21): He knows our thoughts before we know them ourselves (Psa. 139:2, Read vs. 1-16). He ***“is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do”*** (Heb. 4:12,13). ***“He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names”*** (Psa. 147:4); He knows when a sparrow falls to the ground: the very hairs on our heads are numbered by Him (Matt. 10:29,30). But not only does His knowledge span all space: it also spans all time. The future is as well known to Him as the past or the present. He declares ***“the end from the beginning”*** (Isa. 46:10), for ***“known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world”*** (Acts 15:18). This is the reason why ***“holy men of God”*** were enabled to predict unerringly the very many wonderful matters of prophecy in Scripture (2Pet. 1:21).

Closely connected with His omniscience is His omnipresence. The two are linked in Psalm 139:1-16. God is everywhere. He is not confined by space: ***“The heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee”*** (1Kings 8:27). ***“Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD”*** (Jer. 23:23,24). ***“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good”*** (Prov. 15:3). But not only is God “in every place”, in a sense He is in everything. He is the life of all flesh (Gen. 2:7; Job 12:10; 34:14,15; Dan. 5:23; Acts 17:28): the atomic energy which binds all things together, by which alone all matter coheres, is His (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3).

He fills the whole of infinite space with His presence, and that in every moment of infinite duration, for He is ***“the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity”*** (Isa. 57:15), the One who fills ***“all in all”*** (Eph. 1:23).

Scripture also teaches that God is sovereign. He is ***“the Most High”*** (e.g. Gen. 14:18-20,22; Psa. 83:18; Luke 1:32; 6:35), i.e. the Supreme Being, the ***“Lord of heaven and earth”*** (Matt. 11:25), ***“the King eternal, incorruptible, invisible”***, the ***“blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords”*** (1Tim. 1:17 R.V.; 6:15). ***“All that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as head above all ... Thou reignest over all”*** (1Chron. 29:11,12; Psa. 103:19). His ***“dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation ... He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?”*** (Dan. 4:34,35). He has the right to do as He will because all is His, including mankind (Gen. 14:22). He says ***“Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own?”*** (Matt. 20:15). He is ***“the Potter”*** in whose hand all men are as clay (Rom. 9:15-24), and who is accountable to none (Job 33:12, 13; 36:23). See also Job 23:13; 42:2; Psa. 119:91; 135:6; Prov. 21:30; Isa. 46:10,11; Eph. 1:11).

Perfect wisdom belongs to God and characterises all His ways (Psa. 104:24; Prov. 3:19; Dan. 2:19-23; 1Cor. 1:21,24). He is ***“the only wise God”*** (Rom. 16:27), whose wisdom is transcendent (Job 5:13), sound (Prov. 8:14,22), profound (Rom. 11:33), inscrutable (1Cor. 2:7), manifold (Eph. 3:10), limitless (Col. 2:3), and adorable (Rev. 5:12; 7:12). ***“There is no searching of His understanding”*** (Isa. 40:28), because ***“His understanding is infinite”*** (Psa. 147:5).

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable” (Psa. 145:3). Amen and Amen!