

October 13, 2013

Psalm 90:1-6 / Nehemiah 9:5b-6 / Exodus 3:1-15

The Attributes of God (#3): The Uncreated Creator; The Self-Existent Eternal God

Today we're going to be looking at an attribute of God that is so very important for us to affirm -- if we are to correctly understand and honor God for who He is. But there's one little problem. Try as we might (and I have) we can never fully comprehend this particular attribute of God's being.

Logic and reason DO point to its truth, as I hope to show you. But in the end (because finite human reason has its limits in regard to understanding the infinite) it's an attribute we must ultimately affirm by faith as something the Bible declares to be true.

In fact, because it's so hard to grasp, this one attribute is the basis for questions younger people (teenage people and younger) ask me more than almost any others. The questions: "***Where did God come from?***"

Or as it's sometimes been put to me after a little discussion: "***I understand that according to the Bible God created everything. But what I don't understand is who created God?***"

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You see, that's where our struggle to comprehend the self-existence of God comes in. Because everything else in this universe apart from God had a starting point or a beginning. It was born, or created, or came into being through the agency of something else, at some particular point in history.

It doesn't matter what it is. If we could wind the clock back far enough we'd get to a point in time where that thing did not exist. And if we took it back far enough, we'd get to a point where NOTHING existed but God alone.

We'd get to a point where all the limitless reaches of infinite space were empty, black, and void of everything. Where matter did not exist, and light did not exist, and sound did not exist, and no living thing existed (be it visible or invisible). We get to the point where NOTHING but the Everlasting Being of the Three-personed God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) lived in perfect contentment with the delight-filled love that always existed between them from eternity past.

And, then, if we were to then to wind the clock forward in time, we would see one thing after another come into being. Something that is true of everything except God.

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That's why we struggle to grasp it. Because unlike everything else in the entire universe, God has no point of origin, no inception, no beginning, no point where He ever came into being. He alone, as the Bible tells us, ***"is from everlasting to everlasting."*** He alone has ***"no beginning and no end."***

He alone is the uncreated Creator -- the self-existent, eternal, and everlasting God who preceded all things, and from whom all things proceeded. That is what makes Him alone to be God.

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That's the **FIRST** thing we need to see today: The helpfulness of reason and the need for revelation. (So I'm going to ask you to put your thinking caps on again).

Stephen Charnock put it so indisputably when he wrote: ***"To be before all creatures is equivalent to being from eternity."*** Why? He tells us: ***"Time began with the foundation of the world, but God being before time, could have no beginning in time. Before the beginning of creation, and [therefore before] the beginning of time, there could be nothing but eternity; nothing but that which was uncreated or without beginning. To be in time is to have a beginning, to be before all time is never to have a beginning..."***

And he goes on: ***"If God had a beginning, he must have received it from another, or from himself. If it were from another then that other from whom he received his being would be better than he [and greater than he], and thus more of a God than he. He that is not supreme cannot be God. He cannot be God who owes his being to the power of another... Nor can he have given beginning to himself... for how could he be the cause of himself. It is impossible for any to give a beginning or being to itself. If it acts it must exist, and so exist before it acts."***

Which brings us to the only logical conclusion one can draw: ***"If God does exist, and has not received His being from another, he must have existed from all eternity."*** Hard as that is to fathom.

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You see, this is where logic helps us in our understanding of the faith. For it only stands to reason that if God exists now, then He had to have existed from all eternity past, for a solitary being cannot be the cause of His own existence! Reason alone assures us of that.

And thus, Moses, even though he could not fully comprehend how it could be, knew that it must be so and therefore gladly submitted to the revelation God gave Him concerning Himself. And thus He recorded for us in Ps. 90:1: ***"From everlasting to everlasting (that is, with no beginning and having no end) you are God."***

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Revelation declares it, and reason affirms it, leaving us with the need to accept what is so hard for our minds to comprehend -- a Being who had no beginning.

So what are we left with? ***A God more glorious and awesome than we can possibly imagine! A God so great that the mind is stretched beyond its limits to even comprehend what He is like.***

A God so infinite and incomprehensible in the eternality of His Being and limitless in His expansiveness (in both time and space), that as Rudolf Otto points out in his book, "The Idea of the Holy" it overwhelms the human soul with a sense of:

***"creature-consciousness... The emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures... (a feeling) of submergence into nothingness before an overpowering, absolute might... where everything turns upon the character of this overpowering might, a character which cannot be expressed verbally, and can only be suggested indirectly through the tone of a [person's] feeling-response to it."***

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It's just another way of saying that *GOD IS SO GREAT* He can only, in the end, be truly worshipped by the heart. The mind helps, and we must use it in our worship of God, for we are called in the greatest of all commands, to "love the Lord our God... with all our mind..."

But in the case of God's eternality and self-existence, all the mind can really do is lead us to see that God is incomprehensibly great, and that by contrast, we are infinitely small by comparison. And in coming to realize that (as I hope you do today, if you have not contemplated it before) the only appropriate human response to such a God (as the Psalmist notes in Ps. 95) is to: ***"Come and bow down in worship," or "kneel before the LORD our God and Maker."***

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In fact, I can say without hesitation: If you have never sensed in your soul, the deep inner desire (or need) to drop to your knees or prostrate yourself on the ground in the presence of such a God, you have yet to grasp the greatness of God. Because the desire to adore God in worship is what is what the Holy Spirit spawns in our heart once we rightly come to grasp how great and majestic He is.

In fact, if the people of this world could only catch a glimpse of how great God really is, it would change everything about them. It would spawn an inner sense of reverence, respect and humility. People would no longer even think of trifling with God or shaking their fist at Him in defiance. No one would even think of ridiculing His Being, belittling His commands, or using His name in vain.

It would spell the end of profane, blasphemous, sacrilegious & impious living, and lead to a revival of godly, devout, and holy living.

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We see that in the life of Isaiah. Earlier in his life (Chap. 6) he was given a vision of the inexpressible glory of God which changed everything about him and the direction of his life. And thus, later in his life (Chap. 64), when he's confronted with the sin and godless living so prevalent in Israel and how it can be remedied, his prayer is essentially that others might have an experience of God's greatness, similar to the one that changed his own life!

And so he prays in all earnestness: ***"Rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you... come down to make your name (Yahweh) known to your enemies. Cause the nations to quake before you."*** Simply getting a glimpse of what God is truly like would remedy much sin and eradicate most unrighteousness.

That's all it would take suggests Isaiah. To see that God is great beyond our wildest imagination would cause fallen humanity to be moved to silence before Him, stand aghast at the sight of His glory, and quake and tremble with quivering lips in the immediate presence of a God so infinitely and immeasurably great.

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Then **SECOND**, in order to understand this better, we need to take a look at the name God chose for Himself, and what that name says

about Him. For as I've pointed out before His "name" is not simply a title, it is descriptive of something that is true about Him.

And of all the many descriptive names for God, the one God chose to be known by, and remembered by forever, is the name He gives Moses in Ex. 3:14, when He speaks to Him from the burning bush.

The dialogue went like this: ***"Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' Then what do I tell them? And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to tell the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you."***

And then God adds in v. 15b: ***"This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."***

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In the Hebrew the name translated ***"I AM"*** is **"YAHWEH."** It's the name devout Jews considered so holy and sacred they wouldn't even speak it out loud. In fact, they even came up with a derivative form of the name (by changing the vowel pointings under the Hebrew consonants) so that they could at least speak a form of it -- the name **"Jehovah."** Same consonants, different vowels. And when you read your English Bible both forms are translated **"LORD"** (all capitals).

And yes, God does have many names:

**Elohim** is the generic name for God. / **EI Shaddai** means The Lord God Almighty / **EI Elyon** means God Most High / **Adonai** means Lord and Master / **Jehovah Rapha** means The Lord That Heals. / **Jehovah Shammah** means The Lord Is There / **Jehovah Jireh** means The Lord Who Provides / **Jehovah Shalom** means The Lord Is Peace / and **Jehovah Sabaoth** means The Lord of Hosts or The Lord of Heavenly Armies.

Each name is indeed sacred, & conveys something about nature of God. But as this passage tells us, the name God chose for Himself as the one He wanted to be remembered by forever from one generation to the next is Yahweh (YHWH) -- translated LORD or Jehovah.

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So where does the Hebrew name Yahweh come from, and what does it mean? Or most importantly, what can it tell us about God? Listen: The name "YAHWEH," or "I AM," is nothing more than the Hebrew verb "to be." That's all it is!

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So when the Israelites asked, "***what is His name?***" what did Moses tell them? "***I AM has sent me to you.***" The God who "IS" has sent me to you. The only God that is -- the God of all Being. The great, incomparable, self-existent, most glorious One who isn't just above all gods, He's the only God! There is none like Him, but more importantly, there is none but Him.

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And when God adds to the name "I AM" and says: "I AM WHO I AM," or "I AM THAT I AM," it intensifies it significantly and means: ***There is no way to explain me other than the fact that I AM.***

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It means: I'm the One who WAS before all other things existed, and the One who IS and reigns alone over all the universe, and the One who ALWAYS WILL BE -- making a statement about both His eternity and His being the only God who is!

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Yet the phrase could also be translated, "I AM THAT I AM," rather than "I AM WHO I AM," giving it a slightly different twist and meaning "I am the uncreated One."

I am that I am! No one made me! I did not come into existence through the agency of another! I simply am, having no beginning and no end.

Which means God exists outside the limits of time. Time came into existence when God created matter and thus the temporal came into being, and along with it the measure of a successive movements, actions & events within the created order.

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Thus the phrase "I am that I am" can also mean "I am BECAUSE I am." I exist because I exist! I'm the ever-existent, unsupported, self-existent, entirely sufficient, God who was BEFORE time, now acts IN time, and yet exists OUTSIDE of time -- neither subject to it nor limited by it, while working in it and ruling over it.

And because God created time, exists outside of time, rules over time and is not subject to time -- He exists in both the past, present and future all at the same time!

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That's why His other Hebrew name, "El Olam" means "The Ever-lasting God." C. S. Lewis speaks of God as: "***outside and above the Timeline.***" "***In that case,***" he says, "***what we call 'tomorrow' is visible to Him in just the same way as what we call 'today.'*** All the days are 'Now' for Him. He does not remember you doing things yesterday; He simply sees you doing them... He does not 'foresee' you doing things tomorrow; He simply sees you doing them. Because, though tomorrow is not yet there for you, it is for Him."

(LONG ROPE with TAPE!)

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And then **LAST**, why does all this matter? First, because it's what God's word declares. Thus, any view of God which denies it lessens God's glory and diminishes His splendor, majesty and greatness -- His Deity and worthiness to receive worship.

Yet knowing and affirming this is also beneficial for our own personal and corporate well-being. For it puts us in our right place in a good

way, humbling us and assuring us that no one could ever even attempt to assume the throne that He as the infinite and eternal God is alone worthy to reign from.

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The name "I AM WHO I AM," by affirming His eternal existence, also assures us He cannot change. His Name tells us He is who He is and that He cannot be other than who He is -- He is changeless! For one cannot be eternal unless they are immutable or changeless.

And that helps me. For imagine how horrible it would be if God was as fickle and subject to the winds of change as we are! Commanding something one day and then something completely opposite the next! Loving us one day and then casting us off the next! Or promising us something one day, and then going back on His word the next -- simply because He was subject to change!

It would be horrible! Like the lady in one of my churches whose father was an alcoholic. She was very timid and unsure of herself. Why? She told me. When she was a little girl and her dad would come home from work, she'd run out to greet him. If he were sober he'd pick her up and squeeze her and carry her to the house. But when he'd come home drunk and she ran looking for that hug, and instead get a backhand to the face or shoulder that sent her flying.

She never knew what response she'd get. And that did bad things to her psyche. Thank God He's immutable and unchanging!

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Likewise, being eternal and living outside of time and over time, assures us He is all-knowing. As I've often stated: "How can God, in prophecy, give us details of events that won't happen for hundreds or thousands of years?" And the answer is simple: **"He's already there!"**

He knows all because He sees all! At any moment in the present or the future He can say, "I AM," because He's already there! Because He exists over time and outside of time! Which means nothing takes Him by surprise! Nothing catches Him off guard! Nothing happens that He is unaware of! That only happens to people who are captive to the clock and limited by time!

And if we truly know that and believe it, it helps us face the future without fear! Because it tells us our God not only knows all that the future holds for us, He's already in the future waiting for us -- even as He continues to walk with us and beside us in the present! What could possibly bring us more peace and comfort?

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It's like the trip to Honduras. I'm not simply going to go there and hope we can do certain things. I have a friend there (Rick Beck) who is already working on things, and will be arranging things ahead of time, so that when we land it will already be done! And that relaxes me and lessens my concerns.

And he's just a man! How much more should I be able to face the future knowing GOD is already there! That He's already seen and thus knows what He has always known -- and has prepared things in advance for me!

LISTEN FOLKS: If we join the crowd, and shrink God, and make Him less than He really is -- we do it only to our own hurt, demise, or disadvantage!

St. Augustine states: ***"In the Eternal...nothing passes away, but the whole is simultaneously present. But no temporal process is wholly simultaneous... all time past is forced to move on by the incoming future... all the future follows from the past; and that all, past and future, is created and issues out of that which is forever present. Who will hold the heart of man***

***that it may stand still and see how the eternity which always stands still is itself neither future nor past but expresses itself in the times that are future and past?" (Confessions)***

**C. S. Lewis states in keeping with: *"This human life in God is from our point of view a particular period in the history of our world (from the year A.D. one till the Crucifixion). We therefore imagine it is also a period in the history of God's own existence. But God has no history. He is too completely and utterly real to have one. For, of course, to have a history means losing part of your reality (because it had already slipped away into the past) and not yet having another part (because it is still in the future): in fact having nothing but the tiny little present... God forbid we should think God was like that."***