

October 27, 2013

I Chron. 29:10-20 / Acts 17:22-31 / Rev. 3:17 / Isaiah 46:1-7
The Attributes of God (#5): The Inexhaustibly All-Sufficient One

In reference to the Self-Sufficiency of God, **A. W. Tozer** once penned this intriguing prayer -- which I've taken the liberty to update, language-wise. He wrote:

"Teach us, O God, that nothing is necessary to You. Were anything necessary to You, that thing would be the measure of Your imperfection -- and how could we worship one who is imperfect? If nothing is necessary to You, then no one is necessary to You, and if no one, that includes us. You seek us, though you do not need us. We, however, seek you because we earnestly need You, for in you we live and move and have our being." Few have said it better, and none have said it with so few words!

And that's today's lesson. Hard as it is for us to grasp it, need is something that belongs to created beings alone, for no creature has life in itself. Every created thing derives its life from other created things, except God, who alone, as Jesus says in **Jn. 5:26**, ***"has life in Himself."*** He derives it from no one, and gives it to all -- never in any way being less, or in some way depleted, for having shared it.

For instance, as a human being, I have a desperate need for air. Keep me from breathing for a mere 3-4 minutes and I won't survive -- I must have it, for I cannot live without it. With water its 3-4 days / and with food its 30-40 days -- though some have gone 50+ days if they had water to drink.

Or as the general rule puts it: ***You can survive 3 minutes without air, 3 hours without heat, 3 days without water, and a little over 3 weeks without food*** -- generally speaking.

In fact, it takes a mere 10-18 days with no sleep to do irreparable damage to our nervous system, or minds, or bring on death. We are very needy and dependent upon many things! But not God!
He is dependent upon nothing outside Himself.

And once again, it's our neediness or dependence on other things that makes it so difficult for us to imagine a GOD that has none! In fact, it's our inability to picture a Being so infinitely dissimilar to us, that makes us susceptible to the temptation to attribute to God, attributes or qualities similar to ours -- simply increasing them in magnitude and degree when applying them to God.

In fact, it's that human tendency which led one man to insightfully point out: ***"In the beginning God created man in His image and likeness. And ever since then, man has been trying to return the favor."***
Some do it with sinful or ill-intent, and others do it without even thinking about it, though the result is the same either way -- *some sad, ignoble and distorted views of God.*

Thus we must resist the temptation. For although we DO share some of God's communicable attributes, and therefore bear some resemblance, to some of His qualities, as a result of being created in His image (such as the ability to show love, mercy, grace or kindness to others) there are other attributes which demand that we think of God in ways that are as opposite from us as possible.

For there is nothing in us that can even approximate, in any way, His Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnipresence, and Complete and Inexhaustible Self-Sufficiency. To quote Tozer again: ***"Need is a creature word and cannot be spoken of the Creator. God has a voluntary relation to everything He has made, but He has no necessary relation to anything outside Himself. His interest in His***

creatures arises from His sovereign good pleasure, not from any need those creatures can supply nor from any completeness they can bring to Him who is complete in Himself...The problem of why God created the universe still troubles thinking men; but if we cannot know why, we can at least know that He did not bring His worlds into being to meet some unfilled need in Himself... The word necessary is wholly foreign to God... He upholds all things by the word of His power. How can He be raised up or supported by the things He upholds?"

So with that as an introduction to God's Inexhaustible Self-Sufficiency, let's now take a look at today's passages, where this particular quality of His being is driven home with undeniable clarity.

And let's begin **FIRST** with our passage from Acts 17. There Paul is speaking to the people of Athens, who he finds to be very aware of the existence of a divine being, but very unsure concerning what that divine being is like. So he takes the opportunity to fill them in on what the God they think is there is really like by giving them some of His attributes.

And what are the primary ones he shares? The fact that He is Creator of heaven and earth and Lord over all He has made (v. 24). And in v.25 he adds His self-sufficiency. **"He is not served by human hands as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else."**

Then, after telling them of about His sovereign control over people's lives and the places they live, he says, **"In Him we live and move and have our being."** That is, He is the Ruler, Source and Sustainer of all life. And He alone can be, because He alone has no needs!

It is us, needy as we are, that are dependent upon Him for everything -- **"For life and breath and everything else,"** as Paul states. There is nothing we are not dependent upon God for, and nothing which He doesn't sustain by His own Inexhaustible Self-Sufficiency!

Every breath we breathe, every beat of our hearts, every blink of our eyes, and every thought that we think is made possible by His all-sustaining life, grace and power!

And that is true for everyone! Without the life I draw from God and His super-abundant self-sufficiency, my heart would not beat, my lungs could not breathe, my body could not move, and my mind could not think. Which means we are **ABSOLUTELY** (in an unqualified sense) dependent upon God for everything.

And that is true of everyone in this world, believer or not. The only difference between us and them being the fact that we are usually willing to admit it, and they (usually) are not.

In fact, that's where our **SECOND** passage from Rev. 3:16 comes in, helping us understand why the people in the church of Laodicea receive one of the harshest rebukes from God. It's because they utter the greatest of all blasphemies. ***"I am rich; I have acquired wealth, and do not need anything."***

It's a sad denial of the believer's absolute dependence upon God for everything! They claim to be believers, but speak like practical atheists, believing they are the ones who have supplied, and will continue to supply, all they need. "I" am rich, they say. "I" have acquired wealth (be it material or spiritual), they say. / "I" don't need anything, they say.

So what are they doing? They're denying their dependence on God for everything, and even equating themselves with God by saying that like Him, they have no needs!

And how does God respond? He bursts the bubble of their prideful and sinful fantasy and tells them: "***But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.***" In other words, you are so needy it defies words to say how much! In fact, the only "cure" for their wretched condition and poverty of spirit is to admit once again that God is the Source of all that they need (v. 18).

You see, when Jesus said, "***I am the vine, and you are the branches, and apart from me you can do nothing***" -- He meant it! It wasn't hyperbole. It was the truth. And all He wants us to do in relation to that truth is simply to admit it. And that alone would do amazing things to improve the health of our relationship with God!

Then **THIRD**, we need to look at Isaiah 46 where God contrasts Himself with the idols or the "gods" of the nations that surrounded Israel. And you need to know that in this passage God is calling His people -- who have been unfaithful to Him & gone after other god's -- back to Himself.

And what does God do in seeking to win them back? He shows them how even the god's that were considered the greatest of all the other gods of that time -- had many needs, and had to be tirelessly served, while HE, on the other hand, has no need and can therefore (out of His fullness, and self-completeness) serve them, to meet their every need.

That's the unique characteristic of the God of the Bible! In every the other religion the people worked for their god's to get blessings considered wages, or something earned. But in Israel God worked on behalf of His people, and "***is so complete in Himself,***" as Daniel Fuller notes, "***that in working for them He finds His greatest joy!***"

And when one realizes this, he says, "**fellowship with Him becomes most desirable.**" That's what God wanted them to know -- the gods of all the other nations needed people, while He needs no one! And THAT, when rightly understood, should make His people desire to have Him more than them!

Look at vv. 1-2. There Isaiah says: "**Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low, their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary.**"

Bel and Nebo, of course, were the two primary gods of the Babylonians. Bel (or Marduk) was the chief god of Babylon, and Nebo was his son. They were statues or images about 12-16 feet tall, made of solid bronze or stone, and weighing in at least a couple tons!



Bel (Marduk)



Nebo

And when Isaiah says they "bow down," he means they are lowered to the ground so as to be carried on wooden carts or wagons to the front lines of battle, where they needed to be stood up to ensure victory for their armies.

So, picture, if you will, all the soldiers that were needed to lower these two huge statues -- heavy and burdensome as they were -- and load them onto ox drawn carts to be carried off to battle. From Babylon to Jerusalem was about 500 miles as the crow flies, and almost twice that when one considers they usually followed the trade routes that meandered around hills and mountains and ravines, and along lengthy rivers until they could find a place to cross.

And he goes on: **"They stoop and bow down together, unable to rescue the burden, they themselves go into captivity."** What does he mean? When the Babylonian armies were defeated (as they were by the Assyrians in Is. 45) the conquering armies would actually take those gods or idols and haul them back to their own countries as the spoils of war!

"They themselves," as Isaiah notes, those huge idols, **"go into captivity."** The "gods" of the Babylonians were taken captive along with them!

And listen: It wasn't the victors who carried the idols back to their homeland! It was the defeated Babylonian soldiers! They carried them to the battlefield, fought in the battle, and when defeated, had to carry those huge burdensome gods all the way back to the country of the victors! What a burden for the weary!

So picture being assigned the task of clearing the rough dirt roads of rocks, under the blistering Middle-eastern sun, so the wooden wheels of the carts would not hit them, crack, stop or flip the cart.

Picture the carts being pushed or pulled with ropes through streams. Men having to haul dirt & fill ruts from wash outs, or pull the wagons burdened with those statues up steep hills, or restrain them with all their might as they got to the top and then headed downhill -- not to mention the needing to collect and carry food for the oxen every day!

It was exhausting serving such gods! It's no wonder, therefore, that Isaiah can say in v. 1: **"The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary."** It's always that way with gods who have needs! That's why you shouldn't want them!

Then **LAST**, what's God's message to us in this? That idols or any false representation of God (be it carved from wood, stone, metal, or the fanciful artistry of our own thoughts or imaginations) must always be served, because as creations of the finite human mind they will always have needs.

And because they have needs, those who believe in them must always work for them to shore up their weaknesses and bear the crushing weight of all their needs! And they must do it even when they, like the soldiers in charge of carrying Bel and Nebo, are exhausted, feel defeated, are weary, and in desperate need of rest themselves!

Those who serve idols can never simply sit back and rest. They can never stop working so as to heal or convalesce. They must always be scurrying around to steady, or prop up, or carry, or support their idols -- because they're frail and imperfect and thus need our help!

That's Isaiah's point! We should be forever grateful that the God of Scripture (or the only God that truly is) is NOT like that! We are blessed beyond what we'll ever know that our God has NO needs!

He doesn't need us, and is therefore never a burden to the weary! In fact, just the opposite is true. As God puts it in Isaiah 46: 5: ***"Listen to me, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and grey hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you, and I will carry you, I will sustain you and I will rescue you."***

What does He do? He takes everything that the Babylonians had to do for their gods, and tells us He does that for us! They had to prop or hold Bel up to keep him from falling, but God upholds us! (v. 3) Heavy as Nebo was, they had to carry him, yet God carries us! (v. 3b)

They had to work to sustain their gods, but God works to sustain us (v. 4a). They made their gods, but God has made us (v. 4b) -- and He also promises to carry us, sustain us, and rescue us so long as we live (v. 4c).

Actually, the word "upheld," in the Hebrew, means, "**bore your burdens.**" Their gods were burdensome, where our God is burden-bearing, showing us that everything their gods needed people to do for them our God is said to do for us!

Why? Because unlike the gods of Babylon, He needs nothing & needs no one! THAT is the truth God uses to win His people back to Himself. It's as if He says to them: "I am here to provide everything you could ever possibly need because I myself am without need! I'm a spring that will never run dry! I'm an ocean of abundance which can never be diminished or depleted!"

Were all the needs, of the entire human race, throughout all of history, to be put together for Me to meet, it would be like taking one thimble full of water out of a million oceans a million times larger than the universe!

And though I KNOW this refers primarily to God conceiving and birthing and carrying and sustaining His chosen people (as a collective whole) I believe it can also apply to the individual lives of each of His chosen ones.

So think of it my friends: He has upheld you since you were conceived, and carried you since your birth. All those months you were in the womb, frail and weak and needy beyond anything you can imagine, He "upheld" you.

And then, at the appointed time, He brought you out of the womb and has "carried you" ever since. Not a single day of your life has passed where God has not borne your burdens and carried you.

And He promises: *"Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am He, I am He who **WILL** sustain you. I have made you and I **WILL** carry you. I **WILL** sustain you and I **WILL** rescue you."* It's a promise.

Which means that little poem "Footprints in the Sand" is a bit misleading when it suggests there was ever a time when there were two sets of footprints! That it was only during our difficult times that there was "one set of footprints" and only "at those times God was carrying us."

Because according to God Himself, here in this passage -- He has carried us every day since we were born, is doing so right now, and will continue to do so till the day we die!

And how is it that God can be such a vigilant, watchful, ever-present, unending source of life and strength and help for every one of His chosen ones?

It is only because He's free of any needs. Free from needing anyone or anything. And therefore, free to be there for us instead of needing us to be there for Him. If I were without needs I could be there for anyone whenever they needed me. It's my own needs that keep me from being better able to meet the needs of others.

What a relief it is to have such a God! Simply knowing it makes me desire Him more! It makes me want to spend time with Him, because it assures me He doesn't want me to come so He can try to get something from me!

He simply desires to be there with us, and for us, to meet our needs. Something that shows us the incomparable majesty and unmatched glory of our fully sufficient God!