

Contemplating the Almighty

| | |
|--|-----------|
| CONTEMPLATING THE ALMIGHTY..... | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 6 |
| TO KNOW GOD..... | 9 |
| THE ETERNAL GOD..... | 14 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S ETERNITY?..... | 14 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 15 |
| WHAT DOES HIS ETERNITY MEAN TO US?..... | 18 |
| <i>Trust God for the future.....</i> | 18 |
| <i>Can know that He is always listening.....</i> | 18 |
| <i>Confidence in His guidance.....</i> | 18 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 18 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 19 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 19 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 19 |
| THE IMMUTABLE GOD..... | 20 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S IMMUTABILITY?..... | 20 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 21 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S IMMUTABILITY MEAN TO US?..... | 24 |
| <i>We can trust God.....</i> | 24 |
| <i>Resist Temptation.....</i> | 25 |
| <i>Confidence in His desires for our life.....</i> | 25 |
| <i>We can become more godly.....</i> | 25 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 25 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 26 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 26 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 26 |
| THE OMNIPOTENT GOD..... | 27 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE?..... | 27 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 28 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE MEAN TO US?..... | 31 |
| <i>We can trust God in tough circumstances.....</i> | 31 |
| <i>God can accomplish great things in our lives.....</i> | 32 |
| <i>We can trust in His promises.....</i> | 32 |
| <i>The future will be exactly as He says in the Bible.....</i> | 32 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 33 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 33 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 33 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 33 |
| THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD..... | 34 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S OMNISCIENCE?..... | 34 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 35 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S OMNISCIENCE MEAN TO US?..... | 38 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <i>He knows how wonderful we can be even before we are born.....</i> | 38 |
| <i>He knows our every thought, motive, and action.....</i> | 38 |
| <i>God's way is always the best possible way.....</i> | 38 |
| <i>He knew all of our sins before we committed them.....</i> | 38 |
| <i>He can heal us deeply and completely.....</i> | 39 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 39 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 39 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 39 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 39 |
| THE OMNIPRESENT GOD..... | 41 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE?..... | 41 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 41 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE MEAN TO US?..... | 45 |
| <i>He is all around us.....</i> | 45 |
| <i>He is always available to guide us and to hear our prayers.....</i> | 45 |
| <i>We do not have to go anyplace special to meet with Him.....</i> | 45 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 45 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 46 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 46 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 46 |
| THE HOLY GOD..... | 47 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S HOLINESS?..... | 47 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 48 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S HOLY MEAN TO US?..... | 50 |
| <i>When we are saved we can be assured that our sins are not merely overlooked but are fully paid for.....</i> | 50 |
| <i>We are safe and secure in His promises.....</i> | 51 |
| <i>He expects us to be holy also.....</i> | 51 |
| <i>We will never need to stop becoming better.....</i> | 51 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 51 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 51 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 51 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 52 |
| THE SOVEREIGN GOD..... | 53 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY?..... | 53 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 53 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY MEAN TO US?..... | 56 |
| <i>He is not merely a distant observer.....</i> | 56 |
| <i>God can direct and control whatever He wants.....</i> | 57 |
| <i>We never have to be overcome by Satan or by any other evil or sin.....</i> | 57 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 57 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 57 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 57 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 57 |
| THE DIVINE LOVE..... | 59 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S LOVE?..... | 59 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 59 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S LOVE MEAN TO US?..... | 63 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| <i>We can be free to wholeheartedly love Him.....</i> | 63 |
| <i>We can experience God's love for us in a personal and real way.....</i> | 64 |
| <i>We can trust Him for how He created us.....</i> | 64 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 64 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 65 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 65 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 65 |
| THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS..... | 66 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S FAITHFULNESS?..... | 66 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 66 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S FAITHFULNESS MEAN TO US?..... | 70 |
| <i>Security of salvation and God's presence.....</i> | 70 |
| <i>He is in the details of our lives.....</i> | 70 |
| <i>Confidence that our sin can always be cleansed.....</i> | 71 |
| <i>God is always ready and available to comfort and protect.....</i> | 71 |
| <i>Allows us to resist temptation.....</i> | 71 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 71 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 71 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 71 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 72 |
| THE DIVINE MERCY..... | 73 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S MERCY?..... | 73 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 73 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S MERCY MEAN TO US?..... | 77 |
| <i>Aligning ourselves not with the advantageous but with the lowly.....</i> | 77 |
| <i>Because of the necessity of God's mercy we can never demand anything from God.....</i> | 77 |
| <i>Though we should fear sin we do not have to be obsessed by avoiding it.....</i> | 77 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 77 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 78 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 78 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 78 |
| THE DIVINE GRACE..... | 79 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S GRACE?..... | 79 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 79 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S GRACE MEAN TO US?..... | 83 |
| <i>It heals shattered and broken lives.....</i> | 83 |
| <i>We can become more like God in our character.....</i> | 84 |
| <i>We can always do the right thing.....</i> | 84 |
| <i>Gives us second chances.....</i> | 84 |
| <i>It is everywhere, in the small things and in the large.....</i> | 85 |
| <i>It fills up what we are otherwise lacking.....</i> | 85 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 86 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 86 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 86 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 86 |
| THE DIVINE PATIENCE..... | 87 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S PATIENCE?..... | 87 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 87 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| WHAT DOES GOD'S PATIENCE MEAN TO US?..... | 90 |
| <i>We can be patient when sinned against.....</i> | 90 |
| <i>We can be patient when people behave or think stupidly.....</i> | 91 |
| <i>We can be patient with other people's weaknesses.....</i> | 91 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 91 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 91 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 91 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 92 |
| THE DIVINE FORGIVENESS..... | 93 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S FORGIVENESS?..... | 93 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 93 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S FORGIVENESS MEAN TO US?..... | 98 |
| <i>We can forgive others.....</i> | 98 |
| <i>We can forgive ourselves.....</i> | 99 |
| <i>We are free to do what is right.....</i> | 99 |
| <i>We avoid falling into sin ourselves.....</i> | 100 |
| <i>We hate sinning even more.....</i> | 100 |
| <i>We are less judgmental.....</i> | 100 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 100 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 100 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 100 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 101 |
| THE DIVINE COMFORT..... | 102 |
| HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW GOD'S COMFORT?..... | 102 |
| CONTEMPLATION..... | 102 |
| WHAT DOES GOD'S COMFORT MEAN TO US?..... | 106 |
| <i>We can comfort others.....</i> | 106 |
| <i>Our pain is fully understood.....</i> | 106 |
| <i>We have hope.....</i> | 106 |
| ANSWERS TO QUIZ..... | 106 |
| DISCUSSION..... | 106 |
| <i>Situation.....</i> | 106 |
| <i>Questions.....</i> | 107 |
| SOURCES OF BIBLICAL QUOTATIONS..... | 108 |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 108 |
| TO KNOW GOD..... | 108 |
| THE ETERNAL GOD..... | 108 |
| THE IMMUTABLE GOD..... | 109 |
| THE OMNIPOTENT GOD..... | 109 |
| THE OMNISCIENT GOD..... | 109 |
| THE OMNIPRESENT GOD..... | 109 |
| THE HOLY GOD..... | 110 |
| THE SOVEREIGN GOD..... | 110 |
| THE DIVINE LOVE..... | 110 |
| THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS..... | 111 |
| THE DIVINE MERCY..... | 111 |
| THE DIVINE GRACE..... | 112 |
| THE DIVINE PATIENCE..... | 112 |
| THE DIVINE FORGIVENESS..... | 113 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| THE DIVINE COMFORT..... | 113 |
| GLOSSARY OF GOD'S ATTRIBUTES..... | 115 |

INTRODUCTION

In this world of sin and blasphemy, there must be a conscience, desperate effort to know and understand the Almighty God to the fullest extent to which He has revealed Himself. An apathy toward God is perhaps the greatest human tragedy. It causes inexcusable guilt. The pursuit of God is man's most sublime challenge and reality.

The Christian has been placed into the transcendent position of not only comprehending that of the spiritual, but of experiencing fully all that God is. We have entered into a unique relationship of unfathomable intimacy: that of God and man. Our purpose is well stated in the Westminster Shorter Catechism's keynote: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." We must function so as to bring God the most glory possible through our lives.

The goal of any study, book, or teaching should not be to merely know more about God, but to know God more. The Almighty is not to be understood as some historical figure but as one who desires, above all else, an intimate relationship with us. A greater understanding is needed of who and what God is, so that we might come to an ever fuller realization that He is alive, that He is present, and that we, though originally created from dust, can have everlasting fellowship with Him.

We cannot properly appreciate God until we understand Him rightly. It is for this reason that we must fix our hearts, above all else, to pursue a knowledge of the Most High. We must not be content to define Him merely on the basis of opinion and experience. He can only be properly known through the revelation which He has given us of Himself. It is absolutely vital that we constantly search and meditate upon the Holy Scripture. This does not confront us as an option-it is a necessity. The noblest aim of man is the diligent pursuit of the deeper things of God. The application of which produces a greater glory for the One deserving of all.

The surface of the ocean is vast and marvelous, but it is much easier to traverse its surface than to explore the unknown riches of its depths. We are too often content to cross its immense surface and neglect what lies beneath. We can easily view God in much the same manner. Though the difficulty is greater the deeper we go, the unrealized riches are that much greater also. Man cannot plunge into the depths of God unaided. Thus scripture says, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." But to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit search all things, even the depths of God." What the natural man cannot even dream of, the spiritual man experiences. May we always be humble enough to consider the things of God to be of cardinal importance.

We will always learn through natural experience but until we press on to know the Lord, He will be known to us only superficially. To move beyond this, necessarily requires effort. This effort, though, will always be resisted by the world forces of darkness and evil. It is for this reason, then, that our progress must be both conscience and active. Our hearts must continually be enjoined to devotion to the Lord. The emphasis, however, should not be on pressing on to "do" for God, but to know and believe Him. We must first establish the ways of God before we can dictate the ways of man.

No attempt will be made to exhaust any of the material presented in this book, but it will be discussed sufficiently with the hope that the real fruit will be a more personal and individual meditation upon the excellency and majesty of God. The desire is that the material presented herein will be taken much further in our minds and in our lives. The Holy Spirit which every believer has will enlighten and illuminate the scriptures to those who seek truth. "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out of matter."

It will require the ages to come for the Lord to show us the riches of His grace. A lifetime of study here, therefore, can only scratch the surface. No man can exhaust the wealth of the Bible. Only those hearts which have become slow and fat can read God's holy word and not learn and hunger for more. The Bible shall never become dull but men's hearts are ever prone to this affliction.

To whom does God look—The busiest, the most public, the most assertive? God will look, “To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and the who trembles at my word.” And again, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.” Activities will always produce some kind of results; humility will always produce supernatural results. The humble one may be the busiest, the most public, the most assertive, but it is their relationship with God that produces the fruit. The glory is always the Lord’s.

We can have great techniques on evangelism. We can have a top notch program on discipleship. We can have a sincere, zealous heart, but if we do not know how to call upon God, if we do not know Him who “only doest wondrous things,” then who will bless our efforts? Who will supply power? Any program by itself is, basically, a lesson in activity. But the program which is supported by the Almighty God will be a display of the divine glory. To summon the divine aid is a necessity only the proud reject. We are only as effective as we can be used by God.

This work is primarily addressed to Christians—those who have come into a saving relationship with God, having done nothing more than to personally believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. This must be remembered throughout to properly apply and understand the material presented here. There is, however, a universal nature which all possess. We are all born with a sinful nature; the eradication of which can only occur upon death or translation. The Christian, though, receives a second, divine nature upon his spiritual birth. Thus he possesses two natures, but not two personalities. Any discussion of the sinful nature, therefore, applies to everyone. But the distinction is drawn between the condition of the unregenerate and of the one who has been made a child of God. We should be impressed with the stupendous transformations wrought by the Almighty for the one who believes on His Son. Confusion will be avoided as this is greater realized and understood.

A further distinction concerning the Christian’s life must also be realized between that of the positional and that of the practical. What we have become positionally before God may be vastly different from what we are practically. Our positional standing is immutable and dwells solely in the realm of the spiritual. Its reality depends not upon our understanding, belief or even acknowledgment of it. This positional standing is purely that which God has made us upon our salvation and is neither influenced nor altered by our present experience. A true knowledge of it can only result from an understanding of God’s revelation, not by our own experience. It is solely the work of God for man and is immediate and complete upon salvation. This would include, among many others, such great themes as justification, forgiveness, redemption, sanctification, and adoption. A simple faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ is all that is required for these tremendous transformations.

In contrast to this eternal position is that of our own daily practical application of God’s holy word. This aspect of our multifaceted life is our responsibility. Our goal should be for our practical living to become more similar to our positional standing. Though we are the righteousness of Christ positionally before the Lord, our practical experience is generally one of disobedience, repentance, and growth. By God’s grace, we are to become in experience and application what we already are positionally in His Son. As the holy people of God, we are commanded to pursue holiness. Though further discussion has its place among other themes, hopefully this distinction has been made sufficiently clear.

Two principle understandings are hoped to be realized through this work; (1) the depravity of man and (2) the infinitely contrasting immense glory of God. To achieve this end, the person of the triune Godhead, as well as His respective works, will be discussed. This was written in such a manner as to draw one’s heart to God, to express His dignity and glory, and to glorify none other. We must develop a God-centered attitude. In contemplation of what is discussed herein, our spirit, emotions, and attitudes should be fixed on Him. He is the source of all good; therefore, He is deserving of all praise. So to facilitate this purpose, attempt has been made to keep literary distractions to a minimum. Therefore, scriptural references have been omitted, except where suitable, and reserved for the index at the end.

As may be well understood, all literary work pales in comparison to our source of divine revelation—the Holy Scriptures. It is this scripture, inspired by God upon which this work draws. Language strains in any attempt to describe God; however, should hearts be drawn closer to the

Almighty, should reverence and worship be given more wholeheartedly to the One deserving of all, should a greater trust in God and a fuller experience of His love and all that He is to be achieved, then this work has served its purpose. Man can do two things with greatness—he can ignore or spurn it and be like a child or he can acknowledge it and worship. To Him be all “blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.” “So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.”

TO KNOW GOD

Job 7:17 reads, "What is man that Thou dost magnify him, and that Thou shouldest set Thy heart on him?" The answer does not lie in this question. We are, in ourselves, creatures void of good, wholly given to anarchy. There is no excellence in or about us that should cause God to set His heart on us. The answer lies rather in, "What is God?"

Thus introduces the greatest paradox, the most uncomprehendable fellowship—that of an infinitely holy God and His great love for a completely sinful people. We are, in a word, evil. What God is, therefore, must be overwhelmingly greater for He is not content to merely co-exist, but He is desiring to redeem, to regenerate, to glorify. The excellencies of God are infinitely greater than the depravity of man. Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. In the issue of "What is God?" lies the heart of all that concerns men, be he unsaved or called a child of the King.

God is infinite, not only in the sense of immenseness and grandeur, but also infinite to the smallest degree of detail and perfection. The immensity of God stretches from the infinitely small to the infinitely large. Should our minds ponder the smallest possible detail and then move to consider the very largest, that which fills all in all, on both ends, God plunges further, beyond imagination, beyond thought. He exceeds our noblest impression. Our span of comprehension cannot conceive what God is. We must restrain ourselves from defining God by taking all "excellencies" and ascribing them perfectly onto one being. God extends perfectly onto one being. God extends beyond this. What we cannot understand of God, we must believe by faith. Nothing can compare with Him. He is above even our grandest imaginings; "To whom then will you liken Me that I should be his equal?" says the Holy one." But though He is unsearchable, He is not unknowable. The Lord has given us faith, by the exercise of which, natural man can grasp the unseen, spiritual God. Though we fall vastly short in fully appreciating Him, we can still, for what we do know, worship Him forever.

The whole person of God immanently exists as one being, and all that He is defined as existing wholly within Himself. He is completely autonomous and is, therefore, outside of the realm of the created. The concept of God is not to be thought of as the summation of an exalted being and His creation. The created, added to the eternal, does not form the Godhead. The Father exists in but the one form of spirit. The Creator is not to be confused with the created. To do so is to abase the personal to that of the impersonal. It is to relegate God to being merely an object or a force. The truth of a living and concerned God would become that of an inanimate power. Instead, He is self-existent and because of this, He is also necessarily independent. The creation adds nothing to Him. He alone totally possesses the concept of self-determination. He is the Almighty God who has created, though He did not need to. We are not the product of chance nor of a spontaneous exertion of power; we are the masterpiece of an awesome and loving God.

To study God is to study an incomprehensible unity. There can exist no disjunction within the Godhead. He is not merely a composite of all of His attributes. He cannot be "taken apart" and "put together" as we would a machine. He functions incredibly as one. Though He is known and described by His attributes, they are not what wholly form Him. It is rue that His mercy and His justice are different qualities, but they are so interrelated that neither can be fully and properly understood without the other. So it is with all of the Lord's attributes. Only through those things which God has pleased to reveal concerning Himself, may we know Him. Yet even this present, limited revelation is so profound that lifetimes of extensive meditation can but apprehend the surface. Indeed, an eternity of constant revelation shall not exhaust the unfathomable God. But what we do comprehend commands our utmost awe and worship.

All that God does is in full satisfaction of all that God is. None of His attributes prevail upon another. God is wholly consistent within Himself; therefore, He can never act contrary to Himself nor can the situation ever arise in which He will. This, an aspect defining God's faithfulness, will be discussed later.

There are aspects of God which find no manifestation except in His created creatures. These include, among others, His forgiveness, His comfort, His patience, and His mercy. Forgiveness cannot be directed toward the immaterial nor even toward the angels. Only man can experience forgiveness; to only man He exhibits grace. We are the sole expression of much of what God has to offer. Incredibly, these tremendous, divine riches find their gratification only in creatures such as ourselves. What God wants to give is awesome both in its excellence and in its abundance. The question lies then in what we are willing to take. Recognizing this should be sobering as we properly remember our undeservedness and unworthiness.

Given this, man has an intense need to believe that God accepts him. If man's ways are perverted, then he must pervert God to conform to his ways. Man is willing to change anything except his own heart. He will "change" God, he will change his actions, he will change his morals, but only God can change his heart. To the wicked God says, "These things you have done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you." Man will tend to picture God to be like himself. The arrogance of man will distort the immense contrast between himself and God in two ways: he will degrade his Creator by humanizing Him, or he will deify himself to a point of intrinsic righteousness. However, even man in all his wickedness can twist God only so much, and when he can no longer conform God, then he denies Him. "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Thus, as a misrepresentation of God leads to and encourages sin, a proper concept of God produces the fruit of righteousness. It is essential to have a right concept of who and what God is.

The Christian has been divinely placed into the unique position of being able to be conformed to Jesus Christ through the illimitable power of the Holy Spirit. There no longer remains any need to pervert God, but there is instead the one whom is now called Savior. There is ourselves because God has exalted us to a standing. Self-righteousness certainly has no consideration when one has been imputed with the very righteousness of Christ. With the unsaved, all enablement is dependent upon what the limited flesh can produce; on the other hand, the saved can draw from the omnipotent resources of the Spirit of God to be changed from "glory to glory". The unregenerate can never achieve this heaven-high standard of Christ-likeness because the natural man is wholly impotent and limited in achieving the things of God.

For the Christian, to know and understand the nature of the Most High is our most vital function. It is our greatest motivation; it is our strongest fortress. Christianity cannot and should not be built upon anything but God. It is only He who is the rock; it is only He who is the head. The dignity of any individual or church rests solely upon the dignity of the Lord God Most High. The greater the turning or wandering, be it ever so noble, from this always central focus, the greater the worldliness and dullness of heart. God must be the quintessence of our daily Christianity. How we view God encompasses our attitudes, our actions, our motivations, our perspectives. It is what shapes our hopes and desires. Too much emphasis cannot be placed on the vital necessity to know the Lord and to know Him rightly.

A proper attitude about God is necessary in order to have a proper perspective of ourselves. A wrong self-image is self's view of self; a right self-image is God's view of self. We can never understand how God sees us until we understand who God is. Only a diligent study of scripture will accomplish this. How we deal with trials, emotions, relationships, discouragements, or motivations are all directly determined by how intimately we know this mighty Being. Our security, our stability, our confidence rest wholly on God. We will have none of these things if we do not have God, and we will gain in these things only as we gain in knowing and trusting Him more.

"When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with the glory and majesty." Our dignity, glory, and majesty are based only on the comparable qualities of God. Pride is based on self; glory is based on God. We will never see our true glory until we see it first in God. What God has done for the repentant sinner far exceeds that which we can accomplish by ourselves to the degree that God's omnipotence surpasses our own abilities. Reason, of itself, will never

produce a sufficiently realistic impression of matters; only revelation can show our true estate, be it alienated from God or glorified in His righteousness.

How we view God will determine the quality of our lives. Zephaniah 1:12 reads, "And I will punish the men who are stagnant in spirit, who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good or evil!' This verse states that if we do not see God as concerned, as One who does not do good or evil, then we will ourselves, be stagnant. A good indicator of how we miss-view God can be seen in our areas of weakness. A person who does not have the motivation to rid their life of sin probably does not comprehend God's holiness. Someone who struggles with vengeance lacks an understanding of divine justice. Bitterness stems from a un-appreciation of God's own love for them. What is the basis for rightly responding to trials and adverse circumstances if it is not based on the love and sovereignty of the Almighty? We are not instructed by words alone. What we need in our own lives, we must first comprehend in God. The Lord does not command us to do something which He has not already accomplished Himself. He can tell us to "reach the world with the gospel" because He has already died for the world. He can command us to "rejoice always" because for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame. The Lord does not expect us to repent of and resist any thing which He has not already completely defeated and triumphed over at the cross. The infinite Godhead has chosen to concern Himself with the affairs of men. He is the example set before us; we are not to compromise to anything lower.

This foundational concept extends too many, if not all, areas of understanding and obedience. How can anyone properly deal with guilt until they have first learned what forgiveness is? Should God be forever satisfied with the payment of His Son for the sins of the world, only to have His children do penance for their own? Should the death which satisfied the perfectly just God not satisfy those for whom it was necessary? Is our anger against sin so much greater that we must add to the efficacious suffering of our Lord? We must be pleased with what God has done, we must believe what God has said, and we must accept what God has said. To do any less than this is to that degree blasphemous. All of the understanding needed for complete trust and belief has been supplied in scripture.

Perhaps one of the most necessary areas of application for this is our fellowship with each other. Is it even possible to have a right relationship with other people when the necessary relationship with God is neglected? "We love, because He first loved us" is not only the theological basis but also the practical basis. To see and understand more clearly God's responses and attitudes toward us is vital so that we will know what our own responses and attitudes toward others should be. If we believe in God's forgiveness of our sin, how can we think of holding a grudge when someone offends us? Colossians 3:13 commands, "Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave, so also should you." How dare we adjust our standards to anything other than those of the Most High. To do so defies all reason and revelation. Whom God has fully accepted in His Son, are we to determine their acceptance before us by some other criterion? Whom the holy God accepts, can sinful man reject? "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

To serve God, we must first trust Him, and to trust Him, we must know and understand Him. We are such creatures that we do not trust the unknown; we fear the dark. Faith functions on trust and bears its fruit through obedience. That obedience then produces a still greater understand. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him." This is a spiral leading upward into the depths of the Most High. Sin is its only obstacle. The purer our concept of the Lord, the greater will be our heart to serve both Him and others. Though there are infinite degrees of accomplishing this, we will grow in our love for God as we grow in understanding of God. As we mature in our comprehension of the Almighty, this maturation can only engender a response of love.

The greatest task to which the human heart can devote itself is the noble aim of comprehending to the fullest depth all that the Lord God has revealed about Himself. The infinite

riches and the unrealized wealth of this worthy pursuit surpass all that the human heart can desire, all that the human mind can imagine. When reflecting upon who and what God is, one realizes how it is a pity for those who pursue solely those topics which the world has to offer, neglecting the knowledge of the great and glorious God who seeks to be known. How shallow and mundane to be an expert in a specific field or in a choice of interest when compared with the heart of those whose task is to discover all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ Jesus our Lord. The former is a life to pity; the latter is not to envy but to fulfill. May we be willing to do whatever is necessary to acquire this motivation and to achieve this goal.

When considering the issue of God, people are so much more likely to form opinions based on ignorance than with any other subject. And though this ignorance certainly serves as no deterrent for establishing opinions, it proves to be no motivation for seeking truth either. Satan has not only blinded the eyes of the world but has deceived hearts into believing that "ignorance is bliss." This only further amplifies the necessity of the grace of God in drawing people to Himself for salvation. "For a fool speaks nonsense, and his heart inclines toward wickedness, to practice ungodliness and to speak error against the Lord." God, the one most willing to reveal Himself, is also the one most misunderstood. It is the Christian's task to not only discover spiritual truth but to impart it as well.

However, even as Christians, we tend to restrict ourselves in our understanding of God. We tend to focus on those attributes which meet the greatest need in our lives. Someone who feels unloved will concentrate principally on the love of God. One who despises the evil nature of man will center their attention on His justice. An insecure person will more likely ponder His faithfulness. Though this is good, we need to learn to expand our conception of the Almighty. He is not like putty designed only to fill in the voids on our life. But, much more, He desires to conform us to His beloved Son and to ultimately "transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." Since God is not composed of individual attributes but functions as a unity, in order to esteem more fully any aspect of the triune Godhead, we must also consider His indivisibility and totality. This can be easily seen in that a better comprehension of His love requires a thorough investigation into His holiness. To understand the demands His holiness places on a rebellious people such as ourselves opens the doors to greater appreciation of how His love results solely from who He is and not all from what we are. This type of relationship is both interesting and necessary when properly examining the attributes of God. Because He is not merely the summation of His individual parts, a proper study cannot consist only of a convenient dissection of such. However, because of our limited capacity to comprehend and reason, we are obligated to proceed in this manner. This is not a necessary evil, but it must always be remembered that God is one.

For what little we comprehend of God, He stands glorious and awesome. Yet to conceive of the full, immense grandeur of He who dwells in unapproachable light is above our finite ability. "Behold, God is great, and we know Him not, neither can the number of His years be searched out." What He has chosen to reveal about Himself soars far beyond our limited capacity of reason and comprehension. Moses was permitted to see only His back, but He still bowed low in reverence and worship. In heaven when singing of the greatness of the Lord, the four living creatures kept saying "amen" and the elders fell down and worshipped. No man has beheld God, but He called us "in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." For what little our faith realizes, we now worship; can there be any question as to what our hearts shall do when we behold Him eternally by sight? "Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? It is high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

In this awesomeness, our hope lies. We are unfaithful creatures who will hope in that which we believe will be fulfilling. If we see the world as bigger than God, we will look at it for the satisfaction of our desires. A turning to idols is the result of a concept of a small and impotent God. But our thirsty souls will find the world a dry and weary land. Only Jesus Christ offers efficacious living waters. Only as we increasingly understand the Lord will our hope rest more fully on Him. How can we even but glimpse His magnificent love and tremendous generosity and then turn away to beg for dry scraps

from the world? The result of an intimate contemplation of God will be a hope resting more in Him and less in the world. A god ward hope is the outpouring of proven charter. The mature man will hope in God; the carnal man seeks the world. "The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I have hope in Him."

We must draw our thoughts unceasingly to the Lord, incline our hearts to marvel at His greatness and be content to sit at His feet and learn. "Cease striving and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." As the sons of Korah in a song of love say, "because He is your Lord, bow down to Him."

THE ETERNAL GOD

How well do you know God's eternity?

- 1) To be eternal means
 - a) to have been created at one point but then to live forever
 - b) to exist forever (have no beginning nor end) and evolving into a greater and greater being
 - c) to exist forever and be the same throughout that entire time
- 2) Regarding time:
 - a) God is restrained by it in that He is only in the present like we are
 - b) God exists outside of time and is simultaneously in the past, present, and future
 - c) God is in the entire past and present but does not exist in the future because it does not exist yet
- 3) Regarding God's creation:
 - a) There was always some impersonal force that at one point in the nearly eternal past coalesced into the personal God that we know today
 - b) God was not created and has always existed in the form that He is today
 - c) At one point God willed himself into existence
- 4) When we are in a trial God's eternity means
 - a) that He can provide immediate relief and comfort because He knew that it was coming and He knows how it will end
 - b) really nothing since there is no relationship between the two
 - c) that we will not be over the trial until we die and go to Heaven
- 5) The relationship of God's eternity to prophesy is that
 - a) since God has seen everything that has already occurred He is very good at predicting what will happen
 - b) since God has all power He can force future events to turn out the way that He wants even though He does not necessarily know what will happen in between
 - c) since God already exists in the future He not only knows what will happen but He can also direct it
- 6) When Christ died on the cross
 - a) all of mankind's sins past, present, and future were laid on Him because God knows every sin
 - b) He only paid for the sins committed up until that time and is continually paying for sins now as they are committed
 - c) since God could not know what sins would be committed in the future Jesus paid for sins in a general way rather than for each particular sin
- 7) Christians can be considered to be eternal
 - a) False, because we were created and therefore had a beginning
 - b) Because the saved are given eternal life
 - c) Because we have immortal souls
- 8) God is called the Alpha and the Omega because
 - a) They are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and so means that God knows everything from A to Z
 - b) They are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and so means that God is the beginning and the end of everything
 - c) Alpha is the letter "A" and means that God is "All" and Omega is the letter "O" and means that God is "Over" everything
- 9) If God were not eternal then
 - a) something greater than Him would have had to bring Him into existence

- b) it would not change anything
 - c) evolution would be true
- 10) An example of God's being unrestricted by time is
- a) John being able to see future events in the book of Revelation
 - b) Jesus telling Peter to cast his net on the other side of the boat and it miraculously filling with fish
 - c) Jesus walking on water

Contemplation

The eternity of the Most High is perhaps the one quality of God which is shrouded in the most wonder and mystery. The divine omniscience is easier to appreciate since we can compare it to our own pursuit of knowledge. We can, likewise, minutely picture His ineffable sovereignty. The difficulty lies in the conceptualization of the existence of One, when there existed no other, and to think back, back, and further back and still be no closer to any beginning. The visualization of no end may be somewhat comprehensible, but to conceive of no beginning plunges the mind into a state of profound awe and worship. Even in believing this theme, we continue to want to ask, "Just where then did He come from?" and "Who created God?" The answer, of course, is that none can create what never began. What always was, created and sustains what always will be. Reason dictates that God must be eternal; revelation confirms it.

Our minds naturally think in terms of beginning, developing and deteriorating. God has none of these. He is immutable. His infinite perfection extends to both immeasurability and excellence. He is unaffected and unbounded by time. To acknowledge His eternity and to fathom it are two interrelated yet vastly different appreciations. The existence of the eye we can easily admit; as to its detailed mechanism, we must only concede wonder. No attempt of man can ever bring this great theme into concretely definable terms. All efforts must necessarily fall short. Language strains to explain this great and significant attribute, but that of God, which we cannot properly explain, who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen."

We begin the Bible by immediately being impressed with the awesomeness of God. The first five words in Genesis 1:1 set the tone for the rest of scripture, "In the beginning God created." These words emphatically present two of the divine attributes which unquestionably declare Him to be an immense and glorious God. It forthrightly establishes His eternity and, and subsequently, demonstrates His power. Before time and matter, there existed God. Only an eternal being could institute the establishment of time. Matter can fill absolute and universal void only because of the exertion of that which exists outside of time and substance. Before the Lord chose to create that which He did, there existed nothing but Himself—the omnipotent Godhead. Because of this, all else could be created. "Apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." It is only the Eternal Spirit—the self-existent One—that can bring anything into being.

Though His perpetualness is difficult to grasp, it is nevertheless essential to the definition of God. Were He not eternal, He would not be what He is. Two such proofs of this are His omnipotence and His self-sufficiency. Were God not eternal, it would then necessitate His being called into existence by something else since nothing cannot produce something. This extrinsic "force" must also be necessarily greater than what God is since one thing cannot produce another greater than itself. Indeed, this very principle is clearly taught in scripture. This "force" then would be omnipotent and God, the Most High, would be relegated to being another creature. The Creator would instead be the created. Therefore, He could not be self-sufficient because His whole creation and existence would depend on another. What potency He had would actually flow from another. The divine sovereignty would extend to only that which would be permitted. His immutability would be forever in doubt. But God is the eternal One who needs no other. All else save none totally requires His sustenance. The emphatic truth that the Lord is omnipotent, by the very definition of the work, necessarily means that nothing nor any combination of things could have created Him because none could be greater. There

is but one God who will rightfully not share His glory with another. "Thou alone are the Lord. Thou hast made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them and the heavenly host bows down before Thee." "For I lift up My hand to heaven, and say I live forever."

Isaiah 57:15 reads, "For thus says the high and exalted One who dwells in eternity, whose name is Holy. 'I dwell on a high and holy place and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the heart of the contrite.'" This passage contains the sublime truth that God "dwells in eternity." It is not simply the case that God remembers all concerning the past and knows everything which is to happen in the future, but that He exists throughout time. Time, like all else that exists other than God, is a created entity. It is, therefore, God's to use and control to His greatest glory. He is not encased in it as we who are always restricted to the present. He simultaneously lives in the eternal past as in the eternal future. Because He caused time, He is not bound by it. He is, thus, the simultaneous witness of every past and yet future historical event.

We pass through time; God exists outside of time. Though it is certain that we will live forever, we are still restricted by time. God is not. We will never be like God in that we can never encompass time; we will never exist in all of it at once. It is true that the Lord regards matters sequentially: season follows season, year follows year; man is born, he lives and dies; history is remembered, prophecy is foretold, but this is to accommodate our finite comprehension. As God has designed us as creatures of time, He thus relates to us as such. We are wholly unable to extend ourselves beyond this medium. Indeed, it is far beyond our capacity to even envision the absence of time. Therefore, we must surrender our understanding when examining the concept of a timeless existence. We must, by faith, believe that it is unnecessary for the existence of the Almighty, and that though our frame of reference must always include the element of time, God's does not. He is the Eternal Spirit.

An example of the illimitability of God regarding time is the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John. Through the ineffable power of God, he was lifted from his present sphere and transported to future millenniums. He then witnessed and recorded events concerning the end of the ages, spanning over a thousand years. The Lord did not give John a presentation of what the future would be like; He brought him directly to it. John's revelation is unique in that he does not write as a prophet, but as a witness. He was told to record not just what he heard, but also what he saw before him. His revelation spanned not only time, but also space as he witnessed both the events on the earth and the glory of the Lord in heaven upon His throne. He was subsequently delivered back to his present age so that he might record this vision for the generations to come between those two time references. God desired those events to be recorded as scripture, and so the years proved to be no obstacle. He does not just "see" the future; He is there.

Timelessness must be an essential attribute of what God is. It determines that all else flows from Him and not that all things have come together to form God. He is not the end product of an amalgamation of great and mighty forces nor is He the evolution of pure energy; He is a great and mighty Being. It should be emphasized again that before He created anything, there existed nothing except Himself—not time, not space, not matter. He requires nothing to sustain Him. He is totally self-sufficient. As independent as any creature might arrogantly consider itself, only the Most High can claim this description in the fullest sense of the word. He is not to be defined as the essence of all things; He created all things. They are only the result of His being, a minute demonstration on His power. It is He who gave all else its essence. This is not to be construed; however, as meaning that matter is an extension of God—it is the creation of God. He will live forever, while it will be destroyed.

Because God is eternal, it necessitates also that He does not, any way, diminish. If He were to lessen to even the slightest degree, it would be impossible for Him to return to His original state. This reasons because if He has the capacity to restore Himself, then it was never lost and also because there is no extrinsic force or power which could replenish Him. His susceptibility to this phenomenon would be, consequently, increased until a point would be reached when His very existence would be jeopardized and ultimately exterminated. This, of course, is total nonsense but is intended to demonstrate that His eternity proves His omnipotence. Time affects only because of the forces that effect. It serves only as the medium through which these may work. Since no force can affect God,

neither can time. Therefore, that He is eternal necessitates and verifies that He is immutable. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable."

In Psalm 119:89 we read, "Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven." The principles God established in the Bible will last forever, even though their application may vary. Nothing can ever change them because nothing can change God. He cannot deal contrary to His word because He has not limited Himself to a particular set of rules. The scriptures do not limit Him, but, rather, express Him. "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." "Thus says the Lord" carries the authority, not just of being spoken by God, but also as being true with all scripture. It is holy because He is holy. It is righteous because He is righteous. It is good because He is good. It is not that which shaped His character (as it should our's), but His attributes are what designed them. Every word in the Bible has been placed there only after it has been found acceptable and consistent with all of His attributes. God did not write the Bible as we would write a book. When we write something, it generally comes from our imagination or creativity. When God wrote the Bible, it flowed forth from all that He is. It does not just convey His thoughts; it expresses His being. It is, therefore, mocked by the wicked and shunned by the deceived. The damned read it to scorn; the blessed read it to adore. It can freely condemn sin because its basis is the holiness of God. It can justly promise eternal life because it stands on the salvation accomplished at Calvary.

To neglect the Bible is to neglect the greatest revelation which the Almighty has given of Himself. We can read no other written material with so much absolute confidence as we can the Holy Scriptures. It is authored and substantiated by none less than the Lord God. One expecting an intimate communion with the High and Holy One without constant meditation upon His word is doomed to disappointment. We must take the Bible seriously because God takes it seriously. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

The placing of mankind's sins upon the Christ necessitates an eternal God who can span all of time and, in a moment, crush His Son with every form and instance of sin. That all of history's sin may be centralized onto the one Man of Christ requires a God not only infinite in might, but infinite in time as well. It is this that verifies the power of Hebrews 10:11-12, "And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God." A circumscribed God could not accomplish such a task. The magnificence of this truth transcends all human ability to appreciate fully the revelation that "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf". And again, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities." The sin we commit today has already been delivered to and placed on the sacrificial Lamb of God. It has already been defeated and crushed; Christ is the victor.

Once eternity begins, time will take two different courses in men's lives. For those in hell, it will become their prison as they will spend it in utter anguish and pain. Eternity will become their main tormentor since it will destroy any hope of relief. Yet, for those in heaven, it will be our freedom as it will give us the hope of being with and worshipping God forever. We will forever say, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." How sweet the thought of being forever with our God and with His people, to gaze upon His face with no more the threat of sin and to bow with all the host of heaven in wonderful adoration. This is a hope and a destiny cherished by all the people of God.

The wicked mock the Christian's promise of eternal life. They build memorials of one kind or another to perpetuate their name. They consider their greatest safeguard against being forgotten to be a monument of stone. Their hope ends with the grave. They suspect their insufficiency to attain to heaven so they deny hell also. To them, life begins and ends on the earth. The Bible informs us otherwise. It tells us that the wicked "will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." The believer's destiny lies not with the grave, but with His God. The declaration of the Bible is powerful. "And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” For this our praise should be great.

Though God is free from time, it is not to be thought that He is, therefore, unaware of it also. All of history is not one concurrent mass to Him. He uses it to teach us patience and perseverance and, indeed, He even speaks of His own patience. He created the universe over a span of seven days and places no expectation upon us to be instantly perfect in all of our daily life. He created time; it serves His purpose as so all things.

He is the eternal God, the self-sufficient Creator of all that exists. He is without origin, without end. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, and He has granted us the privilege of being with Him forever. The timeless God! It is perhaps this attribute of His eternity that most clearly confirms Him as an immense and unfathomable God. What He is commands awe and what He desires is our wholehearted worship.

What does His eternity mean to us?

Trust God for the future

Because God is eternal He does not have to scramble to help us out when there is a crisis. Thus we can believe that great promise in Romans 8:28, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Because God can operate outside of time He is able to comfort and help us in ways that we cannot imagine. He is never caught off guard and then must rush to set up triage. Several years earlier He might have brought certain people into our lives to help us for that moment of crisis. Or He had the pastor’s preaching schedule work out so that the sermon that we need to hear is delivered on that one Sunday that we need it the most.

He knew before we were even born what temptations will attack us and what hurts we will suffer. Therefore, many events in our lives might be preparing us for those difficult times that are ahead. God does not always just lift us out of trying circumstances; sometimes He wants us to persevere through them until we reach the end. The latter develops greater character, trust, and spiritual stamina. Those qualities are developed over time and God can weave circumstances, people, health, finances, etc through our lives in order to prepare us for those difficult times. Of course, we may fail to utilize those resources and will instead struggle and be bitter but that is not God’s fault.

Can know that He is always listening

Do you believe that God does not have the time for you? Do you think that there are many other more important people or events occurring that require God’s attention? God exists outside of time. He can be simultaneously and fully concentrated on each and every person including you. You can have His undivided attention not because He is ignoring everyone else but because He is not restricted by time. Time does not matter to Him but you always matter to Him.

Confidence in His guidance

Is God confused about the best route to take in a given situation? You are praying about whether or not to marry that person or to take that job. God does not rely on statistics to determine the best solution. He knows what will be the precise outcome of whatever you choose because He is already there. He knows that every one of His promises will be faithful because He already sees the outcome of every person who has believed them and of those who have disobeyed.

Answers to quiz

- 1) a
- 2) b

- 3) b
- 4) a
- 5) c
- 6) a
- 7) a
- 8) b
- 9) a
- 10) a

Discussion

Situation

Peggy is always nervous about the future. If you mention some situation to her, she will always think of the worst possible outcome and get uptight about it. This not only fills her with anxiety but also puts a damper on any plans or ideas that someone else suggests. One time someone suggested a church picnic at the nearby park and she responded, "That park has a playground and children can get hurt on those and then the church will get sued. And then there's the bugs and what if it rains?" Is there anything about God's character and perhaps particularly His eternity that you can use to help alleviate Peggy's chronic fears?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's eternity means to us?
- 2) If God has always existed then who created God?
- 3) By contemplating God's eternity how can that help us through a trial?
- 4) The concept that God exists outside of time is hard to grasp. Is there any kind of visualization or analogy that can help someone understand this?
- 5) It has been said that God created time. If that is the case then what existed before time was created?
- 6) How can a God who exists outside of time be involved in each moment of my life when I am confined by time?
- 7) God is eternal. When we are born we will live forever. What is the difference?
- 8) What are some things that we can do to get to know God better?
- 9) How can someone always exist without ever being born?

THE IMMUTABLE GOD

How well do you know God's immutability?

- 1) To be immutable means
 - a) that God can choose to change within Himself but cannot be influenced by any outside force
 - b) that God cannot, does not, and will never change in any way
 - c) that God will stay basically the same but may have small, nearly unnoticeable changes as He so chooses
- 2) The Old Testament and the New Testament are very different
 - a) This proves that God changed from being primarily wrathful to more loving
 - b) God learned a better way of dealing with mankind and so evolved in His thinking
 - c) God did not change at all but rather replaced the Covenant of Law to with the Covenant of Grace
- 3) Regarding the three persons of the Trinity
 - a) God has always existed as a Trinity even before any Creation
 - b) God split into this at the Incarnation with part remaining in Heaven, part being born a human, and part moving throughout the Earth
 - c) God became a Trinity sometime in the far distant past
- 4) At His incarnation
 - a) only Jesus changed (of the Trinity) and so only He was no longer immutable
 - b) Jesus was still fully unchanging God but now was dwelling in human flesh co-existing with its nature
 - c) Jesus, for 33 years, ceased being God
- 5) Over time God is
 - a) becoming more perfect
 - b) not growing or increasing at all
 - c) increasing in knowledge and wisdom
- 6) God depends on
 - a) Nothing, He is totally self-sufficient
 - b) humans because we are His only outlet for His love, mercy, patience, etc
 - c) creation because He dwells and moves within creation
- 7) If God somehow could change it would be
 - a) towards greater perfection
 - b) for the worse
 - c) a lateral change in that He would not be any better or worse, just different
- 8) In order to allow us into His presence
 - a) God has to compromise to come down to our level
 - b) we obviously are not perfect so God has to meet us half-way
 - c) He raises us up to His level not by making us gods but clothing us in the righteousness of Christ
- 9) That God is immutable means
 - a) that our prayers cannot affect Him and so really accomplish nothing
 - b) our prayers only are answered "yes" when they already agree with God
 - c) our prayers do affect God's actions although they do not change who and what God is
- 10) At the very end when God will create a new Heavens and new Earth
 - a) He will stay the same
 - b) He also will be purged of any impurity that sin might have caused
 - c) He will re-create Himself into a more glorious and awesome God

Contemplation

“Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.” To say that God is immutable is to state emphatically that all that He inherently is cannot vary, cannot change, cannot diminish, and cannot increase. Constitutionally, God is all that He ever will be all that He ever was. He has not reached the state of infinite perfection; He was never less. And although He is ever moving and working, all that defines who and what He is does not change. There is an immense distinction between what God does and what God is. There is no end to the movement of the former; there is no end to the stability of the latter.

“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.” As we behold the heavens and witness the glory and power of God, we are overwhelmed by His awesomeness, and though we are dwarfed by the power seen above and unable to imagine the greatness before us, this majesty of the heavens, like all else surrounding us, is wearing out. It, too, is not immune to the effects of sin and is powerless against its onslaught. Even through the heavens loom beyond our grasp of comprehension, they are as nothing compare to the power of the Almighty. If they, in all their immensity, cannot stem the degenerating effects of sin, then how much greater is God? He is unalterable, He is unchangeable; He is without variation.

God alone is self-sufficient. He alone is independent. All else need Him for their sustenance. “If He should determine to do so, if He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.” The incredible frailty of all matter becomes obvious in contrast to the unchangeable quality of God. There exists nothing, save one, with the intrinsic ability to support itself, let alone to be able to resist corruption and obtain perfection. Self-sufficiency, thus, is necessary for the One who would be immutable. Though all in the universe stand helpless before the wearing of sin and though the heavens will be changed as one would change an old garment, God struggles not to remain immutable. He does not resist; He controls. “Of old Thou didst found the earth; and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed. But Thou are the same, and thy years will not come to an end.” When God establishes His eternal reign, none of creation as we know it will be the same as it is today. We shall be changed. There will be a new heavens and a new earth. Even those in Hell shall be cursed with indestructibility. But God will be the same. Everything else must be changed to conform to His immutable righteousness. The magnificence of this reality is but minutely grasped by our natural minds. Truly, our God is great.

God cannot be influenced to change, either from without or from within. He cannot be influenced from without because He alone is the source of all power. He does not merely stand far and above as the mightiest, but He also stands alone in might. All creation has ability only because God has generously given such, and there could be absolutely no resistance from creation should he decide to withdraw this ability. Beyond this even, He, alone, holds all things together. So how could anything or any combination of things cause the Almighty to change against His will? As previously stated, he does not merely resist and suppress opposing forces; He sovereignty controls them.

Neither can He change from within because there is no facet of His being which is in anyway inconsistent with another facet. As infinite and complex as God is, no aspect of Him differs or strives with any other aspect; they all function perfectly together. Indeed, He is not the mere summation of many infinite qualities, but exists as an inseparable unity. Division will not exist where division cannot exist. Even the concept of the Trinity proves no obstacle to this. Each member of the Trinity is fully God and forms but one God; there can exist no separation of purpose, no separation of being. The might Godhead is an indivisible unity of which no greater excellence can be obtained; no higher position may be reached. This is in vast contrast to us. We experience doubts and misgivings; the spirit strives with the flesh waging war within our members. We grow, we regress, and we change. We strive daily to become more like the Holy One who called us. We sin and repent; we learn. We love to look to the day when the body of our humble state will be transformed into conformity with the

body of His glory. God has none of these characteristics. Infinity, both in vastness and in excellence, will never change. There is nothing within God that can sin nor can even conceive of it.

Because of this truth that God is perfect and is in no danger of being affected either directly or indirectly, He is able to concentrate all of His necessary attention and power into changing us to become more like Himself. For this reason, He can make such a bold promise as recorded in Philippians 1:6, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." All of His superabundance resources can be applied to this goal as He requires none for Himself. The knowledge that the standards which the Lord of Hosts has set and the goal to which He is bringing us will never change should cause great security and comfort. Knowing that the purpose which He has for our lives is one of perfection should give us an enormous sense of honor. To realize that His glorious power, not our own, will accomplish this, leaves us with tremendous hope. Who upon the earth are more truly blessed than God's people! What changes in one's person does the flesh effect: bitterness, cynicism, arrogance, apathy. What stark contrast this is to the transformations enacted by the Holy Spirit.

"For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed." Our security is in the immutability of God. If He ever changed it would be necessarily for the worse since no change could ever be for the better. God's infinite perfection extends to every application of the term; therefore, there is no latitude for Him to vary within Himself. The character of God prevents our annihilation and not any excellency within ourselves. Therefore, if He were to become any less merciful or loving or patient, there would be nothing to prevent His consumption of us. Since all that God is, is involved in the matter of men, it would be impossible for Him to change in anyway and not adversely affect us by this change. But the truth is firm that He cannot vary; all that He has said concerning His relationship with us is eternally guaranteed by no less assurance than His holy, unshifting character. Our security of eternal life solidly rests on the unchangeableness of God.

A mind unadjusted to the whole truth concerning the Lord can easily become distraught. When pondering the truth that God shows mercy only how and to whom He chooses, that when He has decreed a matter it will come to pass exactly how and when He foreordained it, that He can immediately take anyone's life and still be righteous, and that He reigns self-sufficient and does not need us at all, it is reasonable to feel unsure and insecure. We may easily begin to develop the wretched attitude that we must constantly appease the King, lest we fall into disfavor with Him and be consumed by His wrath. However, it is His immutability that gives security and trust. Though all the above is true, it is equally true that He is rich in mercy and that He loves us with a great love, and although He does not need us, He nevertheless infinitely and perfectly delights in us. He is faithful to us and though we are powerless before Him, we are not without a friend. God does not act capriciously or spontaneously. His overwhelming desire to lavishly pour out His love and make us happy cannot be estimated and cannot be fully appreciated. All that He does is completely consistent within Himself and that self will never change.

We are a people accustomed to the shifting temperaments and moods of the people around us. Circumstances and consequences influence our dispositions far too much. We are easily induced by our emotions, and our behavior is often more directed by what we see than by what we believe. We are too frequently more concerned about what men think about our actions than what God thinks about our heart. In this world of shifting loyalties and emotional instability, it is reassuring to know that the unchanging God is ever present. He transcends all of the weaknesses that plague man. We can always turn from the confusion of the world and find rest and tranquility in the presence of the Lord.

It is necessary to realize that because God does not change, neither do His eternal purposes. "In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of His purpose, interposed with an oath in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us." His desires for mankind are eternally established. Though His means of accomplishment may differ, His basic purposes do not. In this lies the fortress wherein we may always flee and find hope, a hope sustained by a reliable promise and by an unbreakable oath. All that the Lord has purposed, He does with singleness of mind. Much confusion can be avoided, however, if a proper distinction is made

between God's eternal purposes and His system of administration. The former do not change; the latter does. This clearly is seen in the Holy Scriptures. Animal sacrifices have ceased because Christ was the one sacrifice for all time. Love has not supplanted wrath but, rather, has been freed through the propitiatory death of Christ. God's purposes have always revolved around a greater manifestation of His glory and in drawing men closer to Himself, so that throughout time, it can always be said that "God does not take away life, but plans ways so that the banished one may not be cast out from Him." What God does in our lives is always for the purpose of us experiencing Him more fully.

Another consequence of the immutability of God is the likewise unalterability of truth. "Praise the Lord, all nations; laud Him, all peoples! For His lovingkindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord is everlasting. Praise the Lord!" And again, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." Herein lies a great truth—God is faithful, God is immutable. All that He has said concerning our lives, the promises, the blessings, the gifts, are absolutely and eternally certain. Divine truth is never dependent on our understanding and acceptance of it. It is as true if we believe and acknowledge it as it is if we completely doubt it. Truth stands because God said it, not because we believe it. Though its application may depend on faith, its reality can never be in question. We would do well to establish this in our hearts and minds. The great relief and security this engenders to the doubting would be immeasurable. Indeed, much spiritual reality is applied to us even in our ignorance of it. Thus, the saved person is totally justified, though they may have no conception of that theme. The son of God will always be such regardless of whether they feel it or even believe it. And though our sin may be great and our hearts tell us we are wholly guilty before God, the promise of "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" stand eternally firm. The forgiven sinner is exactly that. The veritableness of truth lies not in that it is constantly experienced but in that it has been spoken by God. Therefore, because divine truth is never on our own reckoning, it is eternally available.

An amazing concept is that in our natural, unregenerate state, God sees us as described in Romans 3:10-18, and yet, in Christ, we can boldly stand in the presence of God without any fear. The justification in this lies neither in any magnanimity on God's part nor in any compromise of His standards. He shows no leniency in allowing us this position. If it were possible for one man to be saved through God's compassion and mercy, then it would be possible for all to be saved on this basis, and Christ's sacrifices would have been needless and a great error. None of God's dealings with men ever caused injury to His holiness nor to His deity. Though Jesus Christ did leave His estate of full glory and praise to condescend and dwell among men, in Him "all the fullness of Deity" dwelt in bodily form. The divinity of Christ could never change. He was as much God when He walked among men as when He reigned in the heavens and received constant worship and praise. He "emptied Himself" not of His deity, but of His rightful estate of glory and exaltation and of the capacity of self-government. Even in hunger and thirst, He was the almighty, omnipotent God. His physical level became equal with our own, but His moral level remained infinitely pure and perfect. Though He walked among sinners, He still despised the sin as vehemently as when He stood at the Father's right hand.

The heart of our fellowship with God lies not in any absurdity of God merely coming to us on our level, but in the glorious act of changing us to meet His standards. To have intimate communion with man, God had but two options: that He degrade Himself to meet us or that He glorify us to meet Him. Because He cannot change, He changed us. The divine standard imposed by God upon all persons is that of Himself. Consequently, all that He transforms is to this standard. Thus, because God measures righteousness by what He is and not by what we were, we are told that we have the righteousness of God, not just more righteousness than we had. Our transformation spanned infinity; we did not merely rise to a higher plane of virtue. What we have become is much greater than where we have come from. As a result of our position in Christ, our perfections preponderate our faults. We now meet, in Christ, all of the requirements of righteousness and holiness which God can demand. Therefore, because He is immutable, His acceptance of us cannot vary since it rests not on our changeableness but on His unchangeableness. What we demonstrate in unfaithfulness and inconsistency, the Lord infinitely surpasses and overbalances with His faithfulness and immutability.

This is the focus. Our greatest meditation must be upon this. How much richer will our praise be, when we remember and believe the marvelous work which the almighty God has done in our lives, rather than dwelling on our own shortcomings.

This concept of our transformation is further understood by the theme of reconciliation. The word means "to change completely." It finds its application in two distinct ways. One involves the reconciliation of the entire world in its relationship to God. This is stated in 2 Corinthians 5:19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them." Because of its extreme ungodliness, the world justly deserves God's immediate judgment and wrath. However, as a result of Christ's work at Calvary, God is not now required to impute to the world its sin. Thus, He is, instead, able to show mercy and kindness to what would be an otherwise unsalvable world.

The second application of the divine reconciliation involves the individual sinner himself. In Colossians 1:21-22 we read, "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." The sinner, through reconciliation, is placed into a position where he is able to recognize and appreciate the sacrifice of Christ so to believe unto salvation. In neither instance does God change. He does not adjust to meet the situation, but all things are reconciled to Him. They are adjusted to this new relationship; He remains the same. It must be stressed, though, that any reconciliation is always righteously grounded in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

That God is unchanging is perhaps one of the most easily overlooked attributes which obviously constitute the Lord God Almighty. The perverted heart of the wicked grossly reforms God to meet his own standards and expectations. He is made to be all loving or too uncaring or not very powerful. They claim that what He did long ago for some in the Bible, He certainly does not do for any today and that His ultimate judgment of mankind will be based more on leniency than on justice. They mold God into the image of man. The most obvious conclusion is that He is too insignificant to be concerned about. The Christian, likewise, conjectures a concept of a capricious God or even one who has humbled Himself to meet man at his own standards. However, it is to our eternal benefit and to God's glory that truth and reality are as He dictates and not as we perceive. The immutability of God! It is a theme too wonderful for an evil nature to believe. His purposes are immutable, His truth is immutable, His attributes are immutable. That eternity or any other influence will never change God is beyond our ability of comprehension. It is a theme exclusively of God. May our hearts grow ever more reverent as we meditate upon and more fully grasp this awesome and wonderful divine attribute.

What does God's immutability mean to us?

We can trust God

James 1:17 says, "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." We can easily agree that any good thing that we receive is from God. God is good and He gives good gifts. But notice how this verse ends: "with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow." We can paraphrase this verse as, "God gives us good things and only good things and God never changes." He will never give us anything that is not for our ultimate good. This means that we can trust God. He will not suddenly decide to toy with us. He will not grow weary of our stupid and foolish ways and decide to crush or abandon us. God will never renege on any of His promises.

When what the Bible clearly says we should do is opposed by what our culture is telling us then we should, without question or hesitation, obey what God says in the Bible. Maybe we will not get that promotion as quickly or we will not marry as soon as we had hoped or we will never hear those accolades that we so desire but ultimately our blessings will be much more abundant and our satisfaction for doing what is right will be deep into our bones. It is God who blesses and God who curses. We will never regret trusting God and His word.

Even in what we may perceive as failure may be a great success in God's eyes. Many times we set out to accomplish something but it fails and then we are quick to question God, "Why didn't You help me out? Where were You when it all came crashing down?" God is not in the business of making us successful in all aspects of life but rather to be successful in godliness and sometimes those two goals may be at odds. Through failure we learn perseverance, hope, proven character, and to trust in God. All of the great people in the Bible had spectacular failures that they rebounded from to eventually rise even higher. Failure does not mean that God is against us or that we are hopeless and inept. That failure may be exactly what God wants so that, in the end, we may not have a great accomplishment but we have become a better person. Our success must be measured by righteousness and not by power, fame, or money.

Resist Temptation

The verses immediately preceding James 1:17 address temptation. God never tempts us to sin. Temptation is the work of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. This is important because we know that since temptation is never from God we can readily apply 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." No matter how intense the pressure to sin, God will always, without fail, give us an opportunity to escape from it. This will never change. It also means that if we do sin then it was because we chose the sin rather than the escape. No one can ever force us to sin because no one is greater than any of God's promises.

Confidence in His desires for our life

Do you struggle with thinking that God might suddenly turn on you and fill your life with garbage? That He will suddenly stop loving you or caring about you? Then immerse yourself in the truth that God will never change, not even in the subtle way that a shadow may shift. The intensity of His desire to give us the abundant life that He promises in John 10:10 does not vary from person to person. Its manifestation may differ but never the passion of His desire to bless. The fullness of joy and pleasures forever in Psalm 16:11 are not capriciously here today and gone tomorrow. God did not love you when you got saved only to leave you when you sin or in a trial. Because God does not change neither does His tremendous affection and desires for us ever change. Circumstances may seem to dictate otherwise, but we can be assured that behind them God is still the rock and fortress that He always has been and always will be.

We can become more godly

If God kept changing then for us to develop godly character would be like trying to build a house when the plans keep changing or trying to score a goal when the net or goal post constantly moves. But because God is always the same we have a fixed goal that we can aim at.

One example is that we can become more faithful because we are confident of what God's faithfulness is like. Moses made great mistakes and yet because God was faithful to him Moses eventually became the leader and representative of God to a nation. Peter likewise made many mistakes and yet because God was faithful to him Peter ultimately became a great man of God and a foundation of the early church. In these two people we can see this same faithfulness of God across thousands of years. This should not only motivate us but also give us great confidence knowing that as we work on being faithful God will give us the grace necessary.

Any example of God's character is like driving towards a mountain. It is steady and certain. We will not blink and it is suddenly different. What God was in the Bible God is today.

Answers to quiz

- 1) b
- 2) c

- 3) a
- 4) b
- 5) b
- 6) a
- 7) b
- 8) c
- 9) c
- 10) a

Discussion

Situation

Max has been a fairly steady Christian for a number of years. He has had his ups and downs but has always managed to work through them. For the last several months he has been overwhelmed with a very difficult trial and his faith has wavered. He often says, "God doesn't love me" even though many of those times he says it in a mildly joking manner. He skips church every once in a while and when he does go he seems uninterested in the singing and sermon. You have been one of his close friends over the years. How can you encourage Max and is there anything regarding God's immutability that might be especially helpful?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed about, what are some other assurances that God's immutability means to us?
- 2) Why would an unchanging God do things differently because of prayer?
- 3) If God does not change then why does He appear to be different in the Old Testament than in the New Testament?
- 4) If God does not change and Jesus is God then how did Jesus grow from a baby to a man?
- 5) Why do we not bother to learn more about God and who He is?
- 6) How does God's immutability make us feel more secure as a Christian?
- 7) If God does not change then how come sometimes I feel more like He loves me and other times I feel more like He is mad at me?
- 8) If God is always the same then why do so many religions have such different views of God?
- 9) Why should I even care about whether God can change or not?
- 10) Does God's immutability apply to all of God or only to some aspects?
- 11) If God loves us so much then why does He not change? In a marriage, the husband and wife will change to better themselves for the sake of the other person?

THE OMNIPOTENT GOD

How well do you know God's omnipotence?

- 1) That God is omnipotent means
 - a) that He has all possible power
 - b) only that He is the most powerful being
 - c) that He is the most powerful being and He is growing in power
- 2) That Satan and sin exist means that God
 - a) could not prevent them from happening
 - b) allows them to exist according to His perfect plan and will easily defeat them both in His timing
 - c) has nearly equal challengers
- 3) After creating the universe in six days that God rested on the seventh day
 - a) proves that it took a lot out of Him
 - b) was done as an example to us and that Creation was nothing for Him to accomplish
 - c) means nothing because this story was only a metaphor and not a true occurrence
- 4) The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
 - a) are all equal in power
 - b) cannot be compared as being equal in power because they are one
 - c) has the Father as the most powerful
- 5) When Jesus became human He
 - a) relinquished His omnipotence and that is why He was able to be killed
 - b) retained some omnipotence and so was stronger than any other person in history
 - c) was still fully omnipotent but chose not to use it
- 6) Because the Holy Spirit is God and dwells in each Christian that means that every Christian is
 - a) omnipotent also
 - b) the same as before becoming a Christian since the Holy Spirit's power is His own and is not provided to Christians
 - c) has the power of God to resist temptation and do what is right as God so chooses to provide
- 7) In raising Jesus from the dead
 - a) God had to battle every force of darkness and barely won
 - b) God did so with ease even though it was a tremendous display of His power
 - c) God the Father struggled which is why it took three days
- 8) The existence of "free will"
 - a) proves that there is something greater than God because even God cannot overcome someone's will
 - b) is something that God created and allows but does not restrict Him from doing what He wants
 - c) is a creation of Satan to thwart God's desires
- 9) If God is truly omnipotent
 - a) then there would not be any suffering
 - b) then there would not be any sin
 - c) sin will be judged for the unsaved and suffering will end for the saved but all in God's own timing
- 10) That God is omnipotent
 - a) gives us confidence that despite how it may appear at times we still know that God is in control
 - b) matters not to us now but will matter once we get to Heaven and see God in all of His glory

c) is nice to know but does not really affect how we should think

Contemplation

Let us compel our minds to reach and consider the greatest demonstration of God's power. Think of something which satisfactorily demonstrates the force which God can unleash. Would it be the creation of the universe? Would we consider the resurrection of Christ and the crushing of Satan? Or perhaps the final destruction of the universe when even the pillars of heaven will tremble? "Behold, these are the fringes of His ways," the outskirts of His force. The most awesome display of potency we can conceive of merely touches on God's strength; beyond lies incomprehensible power. Nevertheless, as illimitable as His power is, it is fully controlled by all that He is. God is an intelligent personality and not an array of various parts. His might does not strike randomly but is governed by His love, His mercy, His patience. He is rightly deemed the Almighty, the Lord of Hosts, and we can confidently declare as Job, "Behold God is mighty but does not despise any."

The omnipotence of God is one of the divine attributes which, as far as revelation illuminates, has never been utilized to its full extent. We cannot even begin to conceive of, let alone comprehend, a display of infinite power. Even the resurrection of Christ, though opposed by all the forces of evil and to us a stupendous demonstration of power and strength, required no struggle from God. The creation of matter, the melting of the heavens and the earth, the salvation of a soul pose no more problem to do, no more difficulty than the giving of a spring rain. What from our viewpoint are awesome displays of power are from God's viewpoint tasks of equal simplicity and ease.

To even conceive of a more, powerful God would be utterly impossible. All the power that does exist finds its origin in the Almighty, and there is no power that can exist that does not already exist in God. He is not as powerful as He needs to be; He is as powerful as He can be. Should there ever exist a force apart from God, be it ever so small, He would not have all potency; therefore, such a force could never exist. The Almighty does not just have all the force that does exist; much more, there is none that could be added to Him. This argument holds, not because there could never be anything that could augment God, though this is true, but that God Himself could not be increased. The distinction is important. In the former case, God is omnipotent only because there exists no competition. In the latter, it is because by necessity. He encompasses all that there is in that none other could even be a possibility.

Mankind is awed by the tremendous military forces available today. Whole nations are able to be destroyed many times over by the arsenal of an opposing country. We are dwarfed by man's capacity for brutality. Gather all of these powers together, and concentrate them on a single object, if being the sole focus of all of man's hatred and strength. They cease their own bitter fighting to agree to mutually destroy this one common opponent whose only weapon is His own immanent ability. Their objective is one of total annihilation. Their bitterness is so great that there exists no room for compromise, no room for mercy. They are driven to insanity by one mad intention-to vent their hatred and to destroy. Then envision an instant destruction of all of these forces by a mere spoken word. This is the scenario of the Second Coming of Christ in which all of mankind's ability and strength is annihilated by the word of the Lord. By this, the heavens were made and the kingdoms will be destroyed. The potency of God surpasses our own, to the degree that He is omnipotent and we are totally impotent. This same truth is evinced in the scriptures in the principle that apart from Him we can do nothing but that we can do all things through Him who strengthens us.

We cannot think in terms of natural and supernatural ability in that the former originates within ourselves and the latter with God. He is omnipotent; therefore, all power is His. We do not rival Him but, rather, we are wholly sustained by Him. However the Lord of Hosts has given us a measure of natural ability to perform those tasks required by the world. Therefore, even the simplest undertaking is effectuated only by what God has given, but His demands in obedience, extend beyond this ability and can only be directly supplied by Himself. This "supernatural" ability is freely given through grace for salvation and is always present in every believer in the Holy Spirit. The heaven-high standards demanded by God can never be accomplished by the flesh and are doomed to futility without the

surpassing power of the Holy Spirit working mightily within us. In our own power we can survive; through the Holy Spirit we can conquer. How can any degree of godliness be expected without it, and what Christ-like goal cannot be attained with it?

God does not sit in the heavens and do whatever He pleases merely to amuse Himself. The awesome works of the Almighty are performed to be remembered and praised. Even though nothing God does proves difficult for Him, everything He does do is great. When Israel rebelled at the Red Sea and the Egyptians were coming to kill them, "He saved them for the sake of His name, that He might make His power known." But Israel forgot God is being a personal action. Much attention in the Bible is drawn to the works of God. We think that it is difficult to worship that which we cannot see, but then we ignore what we do see. Though some have purported it grandeur to worship God for what He is rather than for what He does, to neglect either is sinful. Though God's works are plenteous, our eyes are dim and our memories are short. Since we "cannot" give thanks for everything, we tend to not give thanks for anything. It is easy to become numb to the glorious workings of the Lord, for our eyes to be blind, for our hearts to be insensitive. We can develop an expectant and ungrateful attitude. We have had our eyes opened, but we refuse to see. How much more we seem to be able to recall the little good that "we" do and then forget the much greater good that God does. To meditate more upon the great things which the Lord has done for us would be a useful exercise for us all.

Perhaps one of the greatest works of God's that we not only forget but indeed belittle is that which He has accomplished in and through our own lives. We consider it modest and humble to downplay how our lives have changed and to limit areas in which we have grown. This is but a trick of the devil. The awesome power of the Lord has not only changed us positionally in ways which we cannot fully comprehend, but the Holy Spirit is, likewise, daily working to conform us experientially to His Son. How we need to be gripped with Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." And again in Ephesians 1:18, 19, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know..... what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." Satan would much rather have us "humbly" deny God's powerful workings in our life than for us to give Him the glory. It is not that boasting is wrong, but that we must learn to boast in the Lord.

Imagine the tremendous power required to transform a child of wrath, laden with sin and depravity, into a child of God able to stand unashamed before the magnificent presence of God. The summation of all our own ability cannot effect the remission of one sin; how great then is this glorious change of all that we are as sinners into all that we could never be without God. Once sons of disobedience now we intimately commune with the living God. This blessed fellowship can occur, not simply because unchanged sinners have been placed into Christ and are disguised by His righteousness, but because of the supreme transformation of the sinner. We are not merely "hidden" in the righteousness of the Savior; it is imputed to us. It is not simply like the case of taking a filthy rag and covering it over with a clean, white container. We are not just covered nor just hidden; we are wholly changed. This is not so strongly emphasized to detract from the marvelous implications of being in Christ but to stress the fact that the stupendous change from without to within Christ occurring at salvation was not the sole change. We are not just in Christ, but we are also conformed to the image of the Son of God. The blood of cleansing has purified us to infinite perfection. What an immense and glorious consequence of the awesome power of God this is. He is greatly to be praised.

To forget the works of the Lord is to be insensitive, not only to His concern, but also to His might. The Israelites rebelled and failed because "they did not remember His power." To concentrate on the love and concern of God during grievous situations can still lead to anxiety and frustration. An infinite, unconditional love, coupled with impotence, may produce sympathy, but it gives little hope or relief. Knowing that not only does our God want to deliver us but also that He can deliver us allows our souls to rest. The Almighty is not merely a well-wisher; He is a powerful God who moves greatly to see His children provided for. Where the world causes hurt, the Lord brings healing. He not only hears the cries of the afflicted, but He can save them also. "Let the groaning of the prisoner come before Thee; according to the greatness of Thy power preserve those who are doomed to die."

When examining an area of our lives which we struggle being obedient in, the primary focus should not be on the of our rebellion nor on the magnitude of the sin. If we compare the sin to our personal, mundane abilities, it is easy to see why it can appear so looming and burdensome. In ourselves, we are helpless before Satan, before the flesh, before the world system. Our sin will always be insuperable when compared to our ability to master it. However, in Romans 5:20, God promises, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." We must learn to evaluate sin from God's viewpoint and not our own, not only seeing it being heinous, but also seeing it as being conquerable. We need to rely on His available resources, not our own. What may appear as an insurmountable mountain to us is crushed under the awesomeness of God's power. The issue is not the ability of our resources compared to that sin, but how infinitely more great the power of God is relative to that sin. We will never be anything but helpless and defeated when we contemplate what we can accomplish regarding the conquest of our sin, yet we will never be anything less than overwhelming conquerors when we realize what God has and can do with it. The heart, in every instance, must depend on God, and in order to depend, the heart must believe. Doubt is overwhelmed by the greatness of the sin; faith glories in superabundant grace. Doubt is crushed by the burden; faith sees the victory at the cross and clings to it. Doubt is cursed by hopelessness and resignation; faith triumphs in the promises and faithfulness of God. The Lord does not ask us to try and try again, but He does ask us to believe and do. For what greater Helper can we be blessed with than that of the transfinite, eternal Spirit of God!

To think that the unconquerable God is not able to see the victory over a sin in our lives is blasphemy to an immeasurable degree. God, in all His majesty and glory, does not sit in the heavens frustrated because He cannot bring those whom He has chosen closer to perfection. God is no less able to impart righteousness than to impute it. We have already become the righteousness of God in Christ; we can certainly practice this righteousness through the Holy Spirit. One is not the triumph of God and the other solely the labor of man. The Lord glories in accomplishing the impossible in our lives. We can echo the words of Jeremiah, "Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee." He delights in exhibiting His majesty through His children. That the Most High might receive much glory through the transformation of our lives is a great privilege which we have been given. Beyond the boundaries of our imagination lie much of what the Lord has planned for us. "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or thin, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever, Amen."

The realization of the power of God is necessary because this power is a basis for the assurance and security of salvation. In 1 Peter 1:3-5 we read, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." This immeasurable, supernatural power protects us from Satan, from the world, and from ourselves. All that has said is absolute because He establishes and confirms it. Consider the tremendous certainty of these truths; God desires all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4); He will cast out none who come to Him (John 6:37); all that is required for salvation is belief in the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:31). What greater reality can be declared as the foundation for assurance of salvation? What opposing force can break this chain against the will of the Lord God Almighty? If God boasts that "no one shall snatch them out of my hand," who will prove that boast vain? Though not all will get saved, those who humble themselves before the Lord and receive His Son can be absolutely sure that they have received the gift of eternal life. This is a rock which no one can shake.

Those who struggle with the security of their salvation either disbelieve His promises or fail to comprehend His power-or both. Even the "free will" of man, when subjected to the declarations of God, cannot obstruct infinite power. "Free will" is not an abstract concept which God has bestowed to a place higher than Himself. Rather, it is totally confined to limitations which He has pleased to impose. These are beyond human definition and can never transgress the declaration of God. Our

will is “free” only within these boundaries and limitations. If He will not lose any whom He has been given, then so it will be, and no protest of the human will can recede that assurance.

Second Peter 3:9 reads, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” It is a grave error to conclude from this passage that since God desires all people to get saved, then either this salvation will happen, or God is not infinitely and freely powerful and will pitifully fail to see even His own wishes fulfilled. We must not misconstrue and pervert God’s supreme desires. Though it is true that He does want all people everywhere to repent, it is equally true that His very nature desires and demands that justice be met and sin condemned. The scriptures declare, “The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.” To conceive of God as having to condemn people to hell because He has limited His power by some set of His own rules is a serious error. In the greatness of God’s power, men are saved, and in the greatness of His power, men are doomed. We must reject any vision of a restricted God. He is the Lord God who reigns supreme; He does whatever He pleases.

The scriptures draw much attention to the magnificent omnipotence of the Lord. It is emphasized as a reason to trust and as a cause for worship. The immense, unimaginable power of Jehovah God is a terrifying yet vast source of security, comfort, and victory. We would do well to spend much time meditating upon its glory. “Be Thou exalted, O Lord, in Thy strength; we will sing and praise Thy power.”-Psalm 21:13.

What does God’s omnipotence mean to us?

We can trust God in tough circumstances

There has always been great discussion about why good people have terrible things happen to them. The two attributes that come into play in this discussion is that God is all loving and He is all powerful. It is generally accepted that God is love and wants to see us happy. Therefore it does not seem to make sense that He would want to see us suffer. So if He is all powerful then why does He not do something about it? Why does He not prevent these crises from occurring to begin with? If He truly loves us and is all powerful but tragedies still happen then something must be wrong so the thinking goes.

One theory about this is that God wants us to always be happy, but He is frustrated in His attempts to accomplish this because certain circumstances are too big for God. He can try His best but sometimes that is not enough. This is rubbish. God created the Universe with a word; He can change any circumstance in any way that He wants. So then why does He not do so? If God loves us enough to want to give us an abundant life overflowing with joy and if He is omnipotent then why do we oftentimes seem to stumble from one crisis to another? There are two important considerations.

The first is that God has allowed sin and rebellion to often override His choices and desires. This is what is known as free-will. Genesis 19:17-22 is right before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. God wanted Lot to escape into the mountains but Lot preferred going to a town instead, so God let him. Of course, Lot then got into trouble so he should have listened to God in the first place.

God will allow us to do what we truly want to do. If we want to be bitter then God will let us. If we want to be self-centered then God will let us be the center of our own universe. If we want to be ungracious and allow petty disagreements to ruin friendships then God will let that happen.

Just as there are laws of physics and chemistry and biology so also are there spiritual laws. If you throw a baseball straight up into the air, no matter how hard you may wish for it to keep going, it will stubbornly reach its peak and then come back down. In the same way there are spiritual laws that cannot be broken without dire consequences. We can read a number of these spiritual laws in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 10:12, “Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.” Proverbs 11:17, “The merciful man does himself good, But the cruel man does himself harm.” Proverbs 12:28, “He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like the green leaf.”

Sometimes bad things happen to us because, even though we may be genuinely sincere in wanting to do good we still sin and that sin carries with it bad consequences. If God prevented us from experiencing bad things no matter what we do then the result would be a lot of happy but evil people.

Also, because our lives intertwine with so many other people's lives their sins will affect us also.

Secondly, we are usually more interested in our own happiness than in God. We tend to ignore God when things are going well because we have what we want—our happiness. But we are down on our knees when trouble hits because we do not have what we want—namely, our happiness. Only God can deeply fill our emptiness and only as we become more and more like the character of God will we experience the true fruit of the Holy Spirit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Trials bring us to the point where we draw closer to God. So if God prevented us from experiencing bad things the result would be a lot of happy but shallow people.

There are also a number of other reasons as to why trials are not eliminated by God. As we experience hurt and then comfort we are able to comfort those who are currently experiencing the same hurt. Trials allow us to feel God's grace in a fuller and richer way. And because coming out of trials redeemed rather than rescued is usually a far better thing.

God is all powerful but He knows that oftentimes it is better for us to experience terrible things than to always be quickly and easily rescued from them. That bad things can happen to good people does not at all mean that God is not omnipotent.

God can accomplish great things in our lives

God can transform us. There is no sin so terrible that God cannot forgive. There is no habit so deeply engrained that God cannot give us triumph over it. There is no pain so wrenching that God cannot heal completely. God has the power to transform a child of wrath, oppressed with sin and depravity into a child of God able to stand unashamed before His magnificent presence.

God's omnipotence means that numerous people who are enslaved to alcohol or drugs are able to quit and never return.

God's omnipotence means that people who were terribly hurt by someone are able to forgive and move on with their lives.

God's omnipotence means that people who are depressed or have terrible self-worth are able to walk in confidence and victory.

Because God is omnipotent we can echo Paul from Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

We can trust in His promises

When God says in Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" we can believe that because we know that God is able.

When God says in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" we are confident because God is all-powerful.

When David says in Psalm 18:2, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" we can stand firm on that because we know that God is omnipotent.

God's promises are not "hope fors," they are just what they are called—promises.

The future will be exactly as He says in the Bible

There will be a new heavens and a new earth. Satan will be cast into the Lake of Fire. We will go to Heaven if we are saved. We will be healed of all of our ailments, freed from all of our sorrows, and delivered from all of life's anguish. We will walk on streets of gold. And we will see our Savior

Jesus Christ face to face. These are not pipe dreams or fairy tales. They will happen one day for each of us if we have been born-again. God's omnipotence will make sure that it happens.

Answers to quiz

- 1) a
- 2) b
- 3) b
- 4) b
- 5) c
- 6) c
- 7) b
- 8) b
- 9) c
- 10) a

Discussion

Situation

Kathy had a rough childhood. She was raised solely by her mother who was verbally abusive. There was always just barely enough food available and oftentimes in the winter the heat was turned off because of non-payment. At an early age Kathy would get drunk a lot to help her cope with this misery. When she was 20 years old Kathy got saved and threw herself wholeheartedly into knowing and serving God. But overcoming her dependence on alcohol has proven to be difficult and she often relapses. What counsel might you give to Kathy to help her out particularly regarding God's omnipotence?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's omnipotence means to us?
- 2) If God is so powerful then why does He appear so helpless during some of history's greatest tragedies such as the Holocaust, World Wars, and a number of genocides?
- 3) What does it mean to make God our foundation? That sounds good, but how do we do that? How do we in a practical way build upon God's foundation and not on sand?
- 4) Why is it important to learn more about God's attributes? Isn't it enough just to know that God loves us?
- 5) If God can do anything that He wants to then why can we read in the Bible about people doing the opposite of what God wants them to do? Why does not He just force them to do what He wants?
- 6) Is there any one attribute of God that you find particularly helpful or comforting to you?
- 7) If God can do anything then why did He have to become a man and die for our sins? Why cannot He just decide to forgive anyone that He wants to without having to have gone through all of that in the Gospels?
- 8) Does not God and Satan do constant battle with God winning sometimes and Satan winning other times?
- 9) What are some examples of God's omnipotence?
- 10) What are some practical ways that we can apply God's omnipotence to our own lives?
- 11) Why do we not see more of God's miraculous power today?

THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD

How well do you know God's omniscience?

- 1) Omniscience means
 - a) God knows everything actual, past through future and everything possible
 - b) God knows everything actual past through future but not the possible
 - c) God only know the actual past and present
- 2) Who is omniscient?
 - a) God only
 - b) God and the Devil
 - c) God, the Devil, and the angels
- 3) If God is omniscient then the actual Creation and history
 - a) is the best of all possibilities even considering the presence of sin
 - b) started out as the best plan, was unforeseeably detoured by sin, but is being brought back on track by God
 - c) started out as good by God but was left to its own chances and fell apart
- 4) God knows each one of our actions
 - a) and our thoughts even those potentially hidden from ourselves
 - b) but only surmises our thoughts although He does a very good job
 - c) but does not care about our thoughts because only actions matter
- 5) God is omniscient and so when He forgives us of a sin
 - a) He no longer even remembers that sin like there is a hole in His memory as in "What sin?"
 - b) Remembers the sin but does not hold us accountable to it as in "What penalty?"
 - c) He remembers the sin in our lifetime but forgets it when we get to Heaven
- 6) God's omniscience means that He knows the outcome to every possible choice to any decision and will
 - a) try to lead us down the best path although the final choice is always left to us
 - b) simply present the top options to us and let us choose whichever one we want
 - c) lets us make whatever decision we want without any guidance but He will try to make the most out of that choice
- 7) When it comes to pain and suffering God's omniscience means
 - a) nothing because He will only alleviate those things when we get to Heaven
 - b) He knows the best way to comfort and heal us and then will try to do so
 - c) very little since He also knows the sin that caused that pain and so will judge that first
- 8) God's omniscience means that we will be judged for every
 - a) actual and potential sin whether in actions or thoughts
 - b) actual and potential sin but only in action
 - c) actual sin in action and thought but not for potential sins
- 9) We can know spiritual or supernatural truths such as salvation
 - a) almost exclusively through God's revelation in the Bible
 - b) mostly through the observation of creation and using logic
 - c) mostly through experience and dreams
- 10) When it comes Satan, God
 - a) does not know his thoughts because God cannot even look upon evil
 - b) knows his every thought, motive, and desire
 - c) tries to think the best of him since He is hoping that one day Satan will be redeemed

Contemplation

The omniscience of God stated briefly and without qualifications is that God knows all. And elaboration of this is that He knows all concerning the actual, all concerning the possible; His knowledge cannot be added to; cannot be forgotten. He does not learn; He cannot be counseled. There exists no mysteries, no secrets, no darkness through which He cannot see. It is not that He is capable of knowing everything but that He forever has. He does not operate on the basis of chance; therefore, neither do we. Any truth that we might discover, any conceivable fact no matter the human impossibility in obtaining, is already known by the Almighty God. His love can give the best because it knows the best. His omnipotence can perform what His omniscience concludes. The giving of Christ for sin was the infinitely best, and indeed the only means for God to have intimate communion with man. He makes no mistakes, and He commits no error. He can never be guilty of inaccuracy.

The Lord God does not need to contemplate or ponder any matter. For Him to prepare and gather information is not necessary. There is no question to which He has not eternally known the answer. He does not need to think through the alternatives; He always knows the best action to take. When God determines a matter, He knows not only the facts but the results. He knows the situational results. The emotional results and the spiritual results, and though they may be wearying to us, we must believe by faith and by His past faithfulness that they are good and acceptable and perfect. Because He does fully understand the consequences, He can never regret any action which He has taken. No matter how much we may sin and disbelieve, He will never regret dying for us.

The Lord has considered it best to reveal some of that which only the divine omniscience can know. We are wholly incapable of absolutely determining the spiritual results of any action or decision. But God does know the possible consequence of any cause. This is clearly demonstrated in the scriptures, principally as warnings and as promises. We only know that the result of rejecting Christ is eternal damnation in hell because God has revealed it. This and the promise of eternal life can be ascertained in no other way. The Bible is rich in such divine revelations. Ninevah was commanded to repent lest the wrath of God come upon them; Abraham was promised to be the father of nations. The soul that sins shall surely die; the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. At the end, Satan shall be executed and Christ shall reign forever. Even faith relies on the belief of previously revealed knowledge. The portion of His knowledge, which He has pleased to reveal, is a tremendous source of fear and of hope. Without it, man would be doomed to an existence of superficiality and uncertainty. With it, he is able to enjoy the immense riches of the unseen God.

All that the Lord has revealed is great and of much value. The wicked arrogance of man disregards as unimportant that which does not personally interest him. It is true that there are themes which may be, at present, of more primary consideration, but this should not be to the repudiation of others. We are self-centered creatures who can arrogantly suppose that only those things which affect or interest us are those of spiritual significance. All that the Lord has gladly revealed, we should be willing to study and learn. We should wholeheartedly love the things that come from God.

Omniscience does not merely entail being certain of what will happen, but also of what could have happened. God knows each and every possible world that could have existed, but this is the one which He has chosen. Despite the "fall", man's thorough and continuous rebellion, the existence of Satan and hell, and the other many consequences of sin, we may be convinced that this is the world concept that will bring the most praise and glory to the Lord of Hosts, the Creator. Man in his great "wisdom" may attempt to conceive of a world plan higher than that of the Almighty's; however, we must recognize by faith that what has been brought into existence is indeed the best. He could have created matters differently, but He did not. A world without sin and a people without rebellion is very much within the power of the Almighty, but for reasons beyond our full capacity of understanding, this world is what will most please the Lord. He not only knows the end from the beginning, but, more so, He has caused the end from the beginning.

The above truth, though presented on the grand scale of all that creation and history encompasses, must be applied when contemplating how He personally and individually formed us. "For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to

Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth." God's choosing of this world plan was to bring all glory to Him; should we think that He was any less careful in His creating us or that His purpose for us should be any less glorious? The declaration "wonderful are Thy works"! We are God's works. God's purposes and desires for our lives should never be belittled. As awesome and tremendous as the universe is, its fate is one of annihilation and consumption by fire. Of God's creation, men and angels are only those deemed precious enough by Him to keep forever and, indeed, even then, men are ultimately to be exalted much higher than the angels. We must rightfully consider ourselves to be the divinely chosen objects, through which the Most High God will receive much glory and honor. To be so honored is to place our value and purpose at a much greater level than even that of the universe. It is as secondary to us as finite existence is to immortality. God did not redeem the universe; God redeemed people. Our value must be realized from the Lord's perspective and not from our own estimation. We are, to the minutest detail, the marvelous handiwork of a loving God. He loves each of us immeasurably more than even the spectacular world around us.

The divine attribute of omniscience is not merely the by-product of His omnipresence and timelessness. He does not know all simply by observing all. It is not just the consequence of a perfect memory. He does not exist in every possible world and situation, yet He is fully aware of every one of their respective details. For Him to be eternal and omnipresent without knowing all would seemingly be possible, but from the above discussions, the fact that His omniscience encompasses much more and is, in itself, an immense and glorious attribute should be obvious. It must be appreciated not just as a fact of God, but as that of Him deserving all of our praise and worship.

"O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar. Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all. Thou hast enclosed me behind and before, and laid Thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, cannot attain to it." This is a majestic revelation that draws much reverence for the Lord. Yet what a terrifying consideration to be searched and known by a holy and inviolable God, to have our deepest and most intimate thought fully known. Praise the Lord that we have been imputed the full righteousness of His beloved Son Jesus Christ. We can find our security in our Savior's perfection and not rely on our own unrighteousness.

God not only knows all of our past and our entire future but even our every thought, attitude, and motivation. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He realizes why we do certain things, whether right or whether foolish. Nothing that we could ever do could surprise God. He understands our discouragements and though He does not condone sin, He understands. Whatever hurts can be healed, whatever is grieved can be encouraged, and whatever is weak can be strengthened. Jeremiah 8:11 reads, "And they heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially by saying 'All is well, all is well'; but there is not peace." In this passage, God rebukes the people for only looking at a problem superficially, for not understanding the deeper needs of a person. God does know; when He heals there is peace. Whatever we lack, He can superabundantly provide. And though we do not need to ever explain to Him our situation, still He loves to hear our voice in doing so. Our soul will always find rest in His compassionate understanding. "For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." God knows the deep, inner needs and voids of our life, and He wants to fill them with Himself. For what God knows and has, from what other source should we ever seek support?

Luke 12:2-7 is a passage which so effectively links divine love and omniscience. To extract its deep riches requires much thought and contemplation. It deserves sufficiently more attention than can be given here. It is very properly worth quoting in full. "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more than they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed

has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you fear Him! And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows.” The Lord Most High tells us that there is nothing about which He does not know, nothing too deep, nothing too hidden, nothing too secret. We may consider the condition of our hearts to be wicked, and yet God who knows fully the very deepest evil that is contained therein perceives much more. On the basis of this knowledge, He is able to cast into hell and no man could dispute; all would be silent. Were omniscience and justice principally that which directed God then we would all be without hope. Yet, though He knows all, we are comforted by the realization that He loves all also and is alert to our every need. We are to fear Him for what He knows but to be secure because of how He loves. The unqualified summary of this passage is that God knows and cares.

What knowledge we have of anything is only that which God has chosen to reveal. Nothing could be known apart from Him who knows all. This would involve not only Himself and the angelic spheres, but also the world surrounding us. We could not experience anything had God not given us the faculty to receive. In the case of the physical world, He has given us our natural senses and the ability to reason. For that which is spiritual or supernatural, He has given us revelation and the faith by which to believe. We see because He made the eye; we hear because He made the ear, we believe because He has given us faith. Why should we regard ourselves as superior, for what do we have that God has not given and what do we know that God has not shown? However, we can shut our eyes and be blind; we can close our ears and be deaf; yes we can doubt our faith and be carnal. Just as we can choose to isolate ourselves from the physical world, so we can choose to disregard the things of God. Just as our physical responses depend on our perception of the mundane, so are the ways in which we respond to the spiritual. Both must be trained and exercised to be sharpened. Both are privileges given to us by God. The first, however, finds its capacity entirely in the flesh. The second is energized by the illimitable power of the Holy Spirit.

If our hearts were only gripped with the omniscience of God, how much easier it would be to resist temptation. We often surrender to sin because we think that we can get away with it; that there is nothing to feel ashamed about because no one will ever know. If we were only more aware of the truth that God knows our every thought, our every motive, sees our every action, hears our every word. We can never escape the observation of God. Men may attempt to hide from the light, but to where might one go to escape from an omniscient, omnipresent God? Man’s eyes may be blinded to God but God’s eyes are never blind to men. To where could Jonah have run; to where could David have fled; what place do the wicked in the book of Revelation find to cover them up? “For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He watches all his paths.” This is the basis for the “fear of the Lord.” The scriptures abound with references to this truth as a cause for fear and for worship. All are naked before Him; He knows what is in the darkness; our secret sins are exposed in the light of His presence.

The reality of the divine omniscience can strike two entirely different keys in the heart of man. In times of suffering, His omniscience can be of great comfort; “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings,” in times of sin it can be of great shame. “For His eyes are upon the ways of a man, and He sees all His steps. There is no darkness or deep shadow where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” What the wicked fear, the righteous worship.

The laws which God has given, be they written revelation, our conscience, of the guidance of the Holy Spirit are grounded in His omniscience. He knows each and all of their far reaching implications, and for us to transgress their limitations is to be deceived by a pride and independence which places its knowledge above that of God’s. This is an arrogance that transports the creature into a position where it thinks that it knows how to satisfy its needs and desires better than its Creator. It mocks the truth that His commandments are not burdensome. It is insanity to the degree that it disbelieves or denies the truth which God as sovereignty established. How dare we to question that which the Almighty has said.

The awesome omniscience of God! What it is transcends the finite comprehension of man; what it means is of significant importance to be cherished by the anointed and hated by the wicked. It

involves spheres which we may never fathom and concepts beyond our most creative imagination. All that God does is in accord with His omniscience; therefore, it can be confidently asserted that all of His works are excellent. This would involve not only that which is visibly accomplished by Him, but also how He formed us and the purposes and plans which He has for our lives. Indeed, such knowledge is too wonderful for us, and though we cannot attain to it, enough is within our grasp to command our worship and reverence.

What does God's omniscience mean to us?

He knows how wonderful we can be even before we are born

Psalm 139:13-16 states how God knows us before we are even born. We are divinely chosen objects. When God was creating us in the womb He was not just creating us physically but He was also creating and planning out key aspects of our lives. It is not in God's plans for us to be defeated or fearful or depressed and isolated. These may be the result of your sin or other people's sin, but they are not God's choices. 2 Corinthians 2:14 proclaims, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ." Plan and lead a life that is triumphant because is the kind of life that God has in mind for you.

He knows our every thought, motive, and action

This will either scare us or make us feel secure. Psalm 139:1-6 reads, "O LORD, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar. Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, And art intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, Thou dost know it all. Thou hast enclosed me behind and before, And laid Thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it." Here David is acknowledging that God is aware of everything that he does and think. This did not send him into paranoia, but instead it was wonderful to him. If your thoughts are generally lustful or envious or scheming then you should be worried knowing that God is aware of them. But if your thoughts are prayerful and good then you should be glad because then God will reward you and aid you in the completion of those thoughts.

Because God knows what we are thinking we can pray silently.

God's way is always the best possible way

God does not do something and then go, "oops." We can pray for God's guidance and know that He is not trying to decide between option 1, option 2, or option 3. We can be confident that His guidance will be the best.

We can obey God's commands knowing that He is not tweaking them as He goes. If God says something we know that it is the best.

We can ask God for wisdom and know that His response is the best answer.

He knew all of our sins before we committed them.

No sin that we commit surprises God. Therefore because God knew all of our sins Jesus Christ was able to pay for all of our sins on the cross.

Colossians 3:13-14 says, "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." In verse 13 the word "all" means "wholly, entirely, by all means, leaving no doubt." Verse 14 has the meaning to "wipe off or erase."

Think of a huge blackboard listing every sin that you will ever commit in your lifetime. It might be hundreds, maybe thousands of miles long. That is our debt to God. We owe Him restitution and payment for every one of those sins. When we are born-again it is as if a giant eraser starts at the top

and sweeps down the entire board in one quick swoop. When it is finished the board is completely wiped clean. That is what happens when God forgives us of our sin. He does not forgive us of most of our transgressions or only up until that one really bad one and then we have to be born-again again. He does not wipe out part of the certificate of debt. He forgives us of the entirety of our sins leaving no doubt and erases the entire debt. Because God knows everything Jesus was able to become and then forgive all of our sin.

He can heal us deeply and completely.

God knows us better than we even know ourselves. How many times have we tried to find the solution to some terrible heartbreak and come up empty? Jeremiah 8:11 refers to this type of situation, "And they heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace,' But there is no peace." But God knows what is happening in our heart; He knows how it is affecting our emotions. In Psalm 147:3 it says of God, "He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds." The Hebrew word "binds" is the same word used to bind or wrap a turban around your head. In the same sense God meticulously wraps up our emotional wounds and protects them and heals them. Because God knows us He can heal our troubles at their deepest source.

Answers to quiz

- 1) a
- 2) a
- 3) a
- 4) a
- 5) b
- 6) a
- 7) b
- 8) c
- 9) a
- 10) b

Discussion

Situation

Sam had an older brother that he greatly looked up to and who took Sam under his wing. When his brother was 12 years old and Sam was 8 his brother was hit by a car and killed. When Sam was in college he became a born-again Christian but he has always been filled with caution and mistrust towards God. One day you and Sam are sitting together and he looks at you and asks, "If God knows everything and is all powerful then why didn't He stop that car from hitting my brother?" How would you answer Sam and how could you use God's omniscience in your answer?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's omniscience means to us?
- 2) God is omniscient. Jesus is God. Then how could Jesus increase in wisdom (Luke 2:40, "And the Child [Jesus] continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.")?
- 3) Because God knows everything in what ways does that give us assurance and confidence?
- 4) Why is it important to have a right understanding of who and what God is?
- 5) If God knows everything then He must have seen ahead of time that sin was going to come into the world. So then why did not He do something to stop it?

- 6) In general terms, what are some aspects of your life that God knows about that other people do not know unless you tell them?
- 7) Does the Devil know our thoughts? Why or why not?
- 8) If God knows everything then why does He ask people questions in the Bible? Examples are God asking Adam, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9), God asking Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" (Genesis 4:9), and Jesus asking the blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51).
- 9) If God knows everything then why does He test people? Examples are Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22), Israel in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2, 16), and Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:31).
- 10) If God truly knows the future then why does not He tell us more about it such as when we will marry or what disaster or victory is imminent?
- 11) How can God know the future when it has not occurred yet?
- 12) How can you explain to someone how important it is to understand that God knows everything now and forever?

THE OMNIPRESENT GOD

How well do you know God's omnipresence?

- 1) God is present everywhere
 - a) except Hell
 - b) in the created but not beyond since nothing else exists
 - c) including Hell, all of creation, and beyond
- 2) Because God is spirit
 - a) He is in and around everything
 - b) He completely fills all space but is not in solid objects
 - c) He is everything because spirit and matter are the same thing
- 3) Beyond the presence of God
 - a) is emptiness that God can fill if He wants
 - b) is not a possibility
 - c) is another universe with another God
- 4) Before Creation
 - a) God was not omnipresent because there was nothing for Him to fill
 - b) There was a previous Creation because God has to be someplace
 - c) There was only God and He was still omnipresent
- 5) Though God is omnipresent
 - a) He still watches everything from a distance from His throne in Heaven
 - b) Sends out His power from Heaven to wherever He directs it
 - c) He is always immediately with us and see us, hears us, and interacts with us right were we are at
- 6) God is omnipresent
 - a) and everyone of His attributes is likewise everywhere to the fullest
 - b) but in some places He is more judgmental and other more loving, etc
 - c) but His main being is in Heaven, everywhere else is just His impersonal spirit
- 7) Though God is omnipresent
 - a) His presence is more concentrated in a church
 - b) We are able to hid from Him at times and He cannot see us as well if it is dark
 - c) God is equally present and fully aware in every single speck of the Earth and Universe
- 8) When we sin the best thing to do is to
 - a) repent, be cleansed by His forgiveness, and obey
 - b) flee from God's presence like Jonah did
 - c) act conitrite so that God will think that all is OK
- 9) In order for our prayers, repentance, or worship to be the most effective we should
 - a) go to a church
 - b) set up an altar of some sort of some sort in our house
 - c) realize that God is equally and fully everywhere and so seek Him right where we are at
- 10) Some places in the world are extremely evil and so this proves that
 - a) God has withdrawn His presence from there
 - b) God allows sin for time being but His judgment will one day be sure
 - c) God does not see everything

Contemplation

Superficially, the divine omnipresence appears quite easy to understand. Basically, it means that God is everywhere, or where anything is, God is also. This does not mean that He is the object, but that He is nevertheless present there. Yet when pondered further, His omnipresence stretches

our capacity of comprehension beyond reason and into a sublime transcendence. How is it that no amount of space can contain God, yet He is seated in heaven? How could Christ say, while He walked upon the earth, that He was at that time present in heaven also? To be ubiquitous is a concept wholly foreign to us and very necessary to the definition of God. This attribute maintains the possibility of His complete sovereignty and omniscience, He could not completely reign where He did not exist, nor could He claim omniscience if there were a place somewhere in the universe where He was not present.

We are confined to a time/space existence; God is not. We can only experience that which enters directly into our sphere of senses. We see only because light comes to us; we hear only those noises which reach our ears. God is not so restrained. Our sphere of presence is wholly limited to that displaced by our physical bodies. God is spirit, and spirit and matter do not compete. They can exist in one space, not side by side, but simultaneously. One error of pantheism, of which there are many, is the confusion of spirit and matter. God created matter, He sustains it, He exists throughout it, but His is not matter. Matter is not necessary for the existence of spirit. The former must be created; the latter can be eternal.

We cannot worship the Lord through objects, regardless of the sincerity of our hearts. They may be used to stimulate us to reverence, but we must always worship the Lord directly. To do otherwise is a form of idolatry. Of course, what need is there then of objects when we are ever before the omnipresent God?

Of course, through the revelation God has given us of Himself, we know that were it true that there should be a place where God did not exist, then in the strictest sense, that place would not and could not exist also. Since God, through His power, holds all things together, were He absent nothing could "hold together." Therefore, nothing could exist. It would be more that empty space; it would be nonexistent. The question may arise then as to what is beyond God. The answer is that there is no possible concept of "beyond God." We naturally consider Him to be merely a much larger entity than all else and that His presence has boundaries and limits, the same as ours. Were this true, then no one, including the Lord, could be certain that He is the only God, for could it not be possible for others to exist beyond His limited range of perception? But the reality of His presence is that it is boundless and limitless. It knows no end.

Before creation, there existed nothing save the Eternal Spirit of God. Matter was not created to fill a tremendous void-there was no void; there was only God. The awesome act of creation brought into being, for the first time, something other than the Almighty God. "Apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." Before matter there was only God, and beyond creation there is only God.

The full exercise of God's omnipotence also rests on His iniquitousness. The Almighty does not exert His power by directing it out of some distant source. His power is exercised from His immediate presence. Because He controls, transforms, and influence by His direct presence, all of His interactions with people always involve all that He is. Therefore, as a consequence of His omnipresence, we can be confident that nothing can occur which could not be instantly and completely prevented by Him. All that has occurred has been either permitted by Him or caused by Him. Because of creation's total impotence, this must necessarily be true. He is in control of all things. A proper grasp of this truth can produce much hope.

All of that which wholly defines God is everywhere that He is. The fullness of the Lord exists in every place. He is not more holy in one place than another, not more concerned, not more just. In no way should omnipresence connote impersonality. Though there is in scripture the concept of a centralized Godhead, this is not to imply the dispassionateness of the rest of His being. His omnipresence does not consist of a central intelligent personality and an impersonal force or influence. What is seated on throne in the heavens and what holds all things together is the same. Nothing could be God that is not all of God.

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Three." Heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain God. We must not visualize the presence of God as merely filling only that which He has created, but that His being extends beyond

this universe. How awesome this attribute is, can be minutely grasped through the realization of this truth. As we contemplate the heavens and even become slightly aware of its great distances, we begin to realize that what the eye can see is but a small fraction of a much larger whole. We are humbled by the vastness of this expanse and of our inability to even conceptualize its extremities. Yet to the humanly unattainable limits of this space, God reaches, to every end, in every space. Then beyond this created limit of matter, there extends what no man can comprehend. Beyond the special boundary of matter, there exists but God. This created universe is infinitely small compared to God's being. He has not limited His size to fit His creation. He does not fill the universe like a glove, but He fills it like the ocean would a bottle resting on its bottom. It is not that His presence has seeped into every created thing but that it abundantly fills it.

There are three avenues of comparison in the above illustration. The first has already been stated-though the universe itself is tremendously vast. It is as nothing compared to the immensity of God. The second is of our own extreme minuteness in relation to the universe, the boundaries of which we have yet to discover. Both of these comparisons should overwhelm us as we try to imagine the differences, yet we are still left with the third analogy-that of God's transfinite being. Comparisons of unimaginable differences have become contrasts of infinite disproportion. There is no obvious need to elaborate. The awesomeness of God when concerning any particular of His calls forth an attitude of fearful reverence.

The omnipresence of God must be reckoned with. Meditation upon this solely divine attribute leaves one with a tremendous awe of how majestic the Lord is, yet even then we are limited by our own finite capacity. To realize that the Lord has all power and strength and that His presence is everywhere lends rest to the believing soul. For what can oppose Him. What can escape Him? To consider that this God has been charged with keeping us safe, how can anyone separate us from Him? "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." All that the almighty God is is determined to keep us as His own.

The omnipresence of God should not be confused with the presence of God as spoken of in the scriptures. One is the positional being of God; whereas, the other is an immediate relationship with that being. In the presence of the Lord, there is fullness of joy, yet it is obvious that there is not fullness of joy everywhere even though God is everywhere. The presence of God is not just an awareness that He is present; the unrighteous can believe that and still be joyless. The presence of the Lord is experiencing what He is, not merely that He is. It is a drawing near to the Most Holy God that He might draw near to us. It is a direct intimacy, communion, and fellowship with Jehovah God. It is not merely an intellectual acknowledgement but a spiritual union. It involves not simply recognizing Him as Creator but of calling Him Father and Friend. It produces a freshness of spirit, a sense of satisfaction, and contentment of just being with an resting in our God. It is the greatest honor and privilege which man can gain. It is also that which is most gratifying to Him, to be with His people and to freely give all that He is.

In Psalm 139 we read, "Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Thy hand will lead me, if I say, 'Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night.' Even the darkness is not dark to Thee, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to Thee." It is an impossibility to escape from God. Though the truth is expounded that God is everywhere, the thrust of this passage is that, consequently, He is always present to lead, to guide, and to govern the righteous. He is forever present to hold us. We shall always have an escape from temptation. We will never fall from His hand because He supports us. We will never be orphaned because we are forever kept by the Father. What other people have so great an assurance? We will never be forgotten by God.

Jonah is exemplary of this. In Jonah 1:3-4 we read, "But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid

the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. And the Lord hurled..." It is twice stated that Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the Lord. Then the very next thing recorded was the action of the Lord against him. Jonah was never farther from God on the ship than when he was being directly spoken to by Him. Since God is fully in every place, there is no where that a man can flee so as to escape from all that God is and from all that He requires and commands. "Can a man hide himself in hiding places, so I do not see him?" declares the Lord. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the Lord." How much less our sin and rebellion would be if we would become more conscious of God's presence; though we may be alone and consider ourselves hidden, the Almighty God, the Holy One, is right there, no more blinded, nor more absent. Men may hide from their emotions. They may hide from their consciences, but they can never hide from God. "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." To where can a person go to avoid the One who fills all in all? The solution of rebellion is not escape, but obedience.

Only the shame our sin would acute us to hide from God. That we cannot hide brings distress to the heart given to evil but relief to the spirit desiring to repent. The first rebels because of its constant accountability and so becomes callous. The second rejoices that God is always available to witness its repentance and restore fellowship. What is despised by the wicked is adored by the righteous.

God's presence does not occupy any one place more intensely than another. He is not more accessible, and He is not more available at one given location than at another. God equally and abundantly fills everywhere and can be experienced fully anywhere. If we find one place easier to reach God at, it is because we have made it so. He is as readily experienced everywhere because He fills everywhere. Regardless of how great the evil surrounding us may be, how obstructive the physical barrier, how profound the darkness, the Lord can always hear our prayers. That unnatural courage should be the product of this truth is obvious. The realization that He is with us always even to the end of the age and that He will never leave or forsake us should effect a boldness and a fearlessness that can only come from an all powerful and triumphant God. If God is for us, who can be against us; if God is with us who can triumph over us? He can be worshipped anywhere, prayed to anywhere We can enjoy His fellowship at any time, in any place. The same principle that holds that none can escape from Him, also guarantees that He is always present and available. No other god of man's device, though it be the zenith of his wisdom and creativity, is as great as our God. He is the one who reigns, who is true, and who is ever present. We could never mold a God as awesome as the One who has molded us.

As we enter into a saving relationship with the Most High, one thing we notice is a greater awareness of His presence, a sense of His constant immediacy. We realize not only that He always knows and sees us, but that He is always here with us. Indeed, what closer fellowship might we have than for Him to live inside of us, to make us His holy temple and dwelling place? The infinite, majestic God is here in our midst, rejoicing over us with shouts of gladness. Our spirit, which was once dead, how now been made alive to commune with the Holy God and to enter with confidence into the holy place. To be aware of this gives one a great sense of security and hope. The omnipresence of God is not simply an attribute to acknowledge as true, but to also experience as real.

That God exists everywhere is a simple enough concept to grasp at first, but as our mediation plunges further into the depths of revelation, we find ourselves once again dwarfed by the surpassing awesomeness of the Lord God Most High. His omnipresence draws us at once to the unimaginable concept of His self-existence and also to the realization of His constant and immediate presence. He is a personal God who exists everywhere and beyond. He fights for us, supports us, and forever loves us. The declaration of scripture is both awesome and beautiful; "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou has taken hold of my right hand. With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, and afterward receive me to glory." Our destiny is one of forever enjoying the presence of our Lord. Who can devise a greater pleasure?

What does God's omnipresence mean to us?

He is all around us.

When a soldier goes into a war zone he does not want to be exposed and vulnerable. Danger can come from any angle. He prefers to be surrounded by as much armor as possible with the best option being inside an armored vehicle.

There are many ways and angles that life can hurt us. Sometimes our past can haunt us or we may be heading into a bad situation. Other times we may be blindsided by a malicious attack from a colleague, friend, or relative. And often our fall can hurt even worse. But praise God that He is there for us.

God is under us to cushion and comfort us when we fall. Deuteronomy 33:7, "The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

God covers us from those who arrogantly stand above us and make accusations. Psalm 91:4, "He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge."

God goes before us so that we might make right decisions. Isaiah 45:2, "'I will go before you and make the rough places smooth."

God protects us from our past. Isaiah 58:8, "The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard."

God is to our left and to our right to guard us from unexpected attacks. Psalm 125:2, "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people from this time forth and forever."

Of course, God does allow some attacks to get through but even then He is there to give wisdom, support, and comfort. Wherever we go, God is right there to protect us, guide us, prepare the way for us, and support us when we fall. We are truly surrounded by God.

He is always available to guide us and to hear our prayers.

No matter how horrible the crisis or how confused life may become, God is always right there to help us out. No matter how deep our sin God is always there to give us victory. Even if we are abandoned by all others God is still there for us.

God is not like a lighthouse that we have to move towards to get out of trouble; rather, He is like a shepherd who picks us up and carries us away from danger.

We do not have to go anywhere special to meet with Him.

Many religions have temples that you have to go to in order to be with God. But because God is everywhere equally we don't have to go anywhere special to worship God, to pray to God, and to be with God. We can meet with God while driving to work, while preparing dinner, or while walking around.

Answers to quiz

- 1) c
- 2) a
- 3) b
- 4) c
- 5) c
- 6) a
- 7) c
- 8) a
- 9) c
- 10) b

Discussion

Situation

Floyd got saved around a year ago and when he started coming to your church you became friends. Though you know that no one completely cleans up every aspect of their life soon after becoming a Christian you have a suspicion that Floyd still regularly indulges in pornography. You have asked him about it and his reply is always that he used to be heavy into it but that stopped immediately after he got saved. Then one day you are at his house and you notice a pornography magazine that was carelessly left on a table. You notice that it is a recent issue. Just then Floyd walks into the room and sees what you have found. He stammers but cannot explain it away. You ask him to sit down. What will you say to him and how might God's omnipresence prove to be a deterrent?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's omnipresence means to us?
- 2) If God is everywhere, then why do so many people, including many Christians, feel so abandoned and alone?
- 3) How does knowing that God is omnipresent help us as we go through life?
- 4) Because God knows everything and is everywhere what does that mean to us regarding temptation and sin?
- 5) How will our understanding of God's relationship to us help us in our relationships with others?
- 6) If God is all around me and with me then why do not I feel His presence in some special obvious way?
- 7) Romans 8:9 reads, "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you but if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." If God is everywhere then how can someone not have the Spirit of Christ?
- 8) If God is everywhere then why do some people feel that they need to go to church to pray?
- 9) Matthew 18:20 says, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." If God is omnipresent then is not He already in our midst all of the time anyway? So what does this verse mean?
- 10) What is the difference between being everywhere and being everything?
- 11) If God is everywhere then why does the Bible talk about Him being on a throne in Heaven?
- 12) In a culture where people do not think that God sees their sin, how do you to this type of person that God is everywhere?
- 13) If God is everywhere then why do we not see Him?

THE HOLY GOD

How well do you know God's holiness?

- 1) A complete definition of holiness is
 - a) never having sinned
 - b) always thinking of spiritual things
 - c) never having sinned and hating sin
- 2) Sin is determined and measured only against
 - a) the character of God
 - b) the laws of our government
 - c) our conscience
- 3) The Heavens and Earth will be destroyed at the end because
 - a) sin has contaminated all of it and it must be created new and pure
 - b) God did not get it right the first time
 - c) God likes to create things and everything is always being created in never-ending cycles
- 4) Because God is holy, entrance into Heaven is available only to those who
 - a) never sinned
 - b) are more good than bad
 - c) sinned but have made perfect in Christ
- 5) If God were not holy then
 - a) His justice would be unjust
 - b) He would be able to relate to us better
 - c) Nothing much would be different
- 6) Our sin
 - a) makes God mad and disappointed but that is it
 - b) causes an infinite separation or gap between us and God
 - c) can easily be atoned for by some prayers or by going to church or by doing something extra good
- 7) Because sin is not instantly punished this means that
 - a) God is long-suffering but that judgment will come
 - b) that God is sometimes indifferent to sin
 - c) that God gets preoccupied with other issues and forgets about some wrong incidences
- 8) Because God is perfectly holy
 - a) our sins are so small in comparison as to be meaningless
 - b) there is nothing that anyone including God can do to make us right with Him
 - c) it takes nothing less than the sacrifice of God's perfectly holy Son to make us right with Him
- 9) Once we are born-again God's holiness
 - a) demands perfection from then on or we will lose our salvation
 - b) promises that we will never be condemned again
 - c) will forgive our small sins but condemns us for our big sins
- 10) The holiness of God should cause us to
 - a) be confident and worship
 - b) realize that God cannot tolerate such dirty sinners such as ourselves and so has abandoned us
 - c) continually think of every sin that we commit and repent

Contemplation

To define holiness as a mere abstinence from sin is to be only half right. It is not only a lack of sin in character, but includes a deep hatred of it also. To be without sin is to be pure. To be without sin and to also hate sin is to be holy. God is holy. His allowance of the existence of sin is not synonymous with an approval of it. In none of His plans or promises is His hatred of evil compromised. The Scriptures are emphatic in maintaining the greatness of the Lord's holiness. "For Thou are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with Thee. The boastful shall not stand before Thine eyes; Thou dost hate all who do iniquity. Thou dost destroy those who speak falsehood; the Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit. But as for me, by Thine abundant loving-kindness I will enter Thy house, at Thy holy temple I will bow in reverence for Thee."

Sin is any nonconformity to God. As such, the great heinousness of our transgression lies not so much in the sin itself, but in that it is measured against the perfect holiness of God. Had God not established the boundaries of righteousness, then man would have been unable to define any on his own. The prophet Jeremiah said, "I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself; nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps." In order to understand the magnitude of our sin, it must be computed not by our nature, but against God's. Then sin is put into a right perspective. Only in this light can it be more understood why nothing short of a sacrifice of immeasurable holiness could satisfy the righteous demands against sin. Sin will never seem so bad if it is viewed in light of ourselves. Consequently, the only source of this revelation is the Scripture which God has given to us. Our consciences, though effective, can become callous. Our actions, however evil, may be generally condoned and even respected by the world. The "hero" is oftentimes the one whose life is especially displeasing to God. The most accurate estimation of our sinfulness can come only from a proper understanding of the word of God.

Sin is an outrage to the holiness and government of God. Sin slanders all that God is, all that God says. He could not hate it any more; He could not condemn it any less. Any sin, though limited in itself, becomes infinitely evil when measured against the perfect holiness of the Most High. It is the cause and the focus of the wrath of God that is to come upon the sons of disobedience. Its purging is the reason why "the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." The human mind necessarily fails in any attempt to fully and rightly comprehend how truly evil our sin is. The Lord can never show leniency nor compromise when dealing with it. We must never interpret these attributes as indicative of anything short of an intense, infinite hatred of it. Though He originally permitted it, He never created it, but it shall be used for His ultimate glory, "For the wrath of man shall praise Thee." No action of God's regarding sin should ever be construed as acceptance or leniency.

No other attribute places such an impossible standard upon the sinner as that of His holiness. It demands nothing less than absolute perfection. Consequently, anything short of this, irrespective of degree, is evil and stands condemned. His justice is so demanding, His wrath so fearful because He is absolute holiness. His justice is predicated entirely on His holiness. The justice of God, without the holiness of God would be inequity. God would have no basis for His wrath were He not holy. Only righteousness can judge evil and the greater the righteousness, the greater the condemnation. Were there no standard of righteousness, then there could be no basis of judgment. But all do stand condemned because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The Lord is holy and righteous. There is no greater separation of any two things to the universe than that caused by the human sin and the holiness of God. Were it even possible for man to move closer to God on his own merit than at the completion of his life, he would be no nearer to God than he was at the beginning. No amount of finite "good works" can ever bridge a gap of infinite width. Of course, the truth is that man has neither merit nor good works. Since he cannot "inch" closer to God, he must instead be suddenly and irreversibly pulled across this gap. Only the infinite can open and conquer the immeasurable. This is the salvation of God through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, bridged this immeasurably profound abyss and thus is the one mediator between God and man.

We are sinners not only in action, but also in nature. We are wholly depraved and evil. Our sin does not create our sin nature; our sin nature is what creates the sin. We are not made evil; we are evil. It is not the rebellion from without, but the rebellion from within that conceives our initial sin. We are “by nature children of wrath.” In ourselves, we have no capacity for good. There is no issue of balancing our “good” from the sinful. We all justly deserve nothing short of the eternal wrath of God. Our present state should be the darkness of hell. For any one to think that they can deserve or earn heaven by virtue of their life is pure deception and arrogance. But what qualifies us for hell is also what qualifies us for grace. In this we can be thankful, not that we are so evil, but that the Lord is so good.

Psalm 10:11 records the thoughts of the wicked, “He says to himself, ‘God has forgotten; He has hidden His face; He will never see it.’” The wicked think that God will dismiss or disregard their sin. They consider their sin to be incidental to Him and, thus, mock His holiness. They tempt God through the great sin of being apathetic toward evil and its consequences. Their temporary “escape” from judgment dulls their heart to the necessary, eternal retribution. They do not realize that the sentence has already been established; what remains is its execution. They are already condemned. But because the sentence against their evil deeds is not executed quickly, their hearts are given fully to do evil. The long-suffering of God is perverted to the leniency of God. This attitude is the thrust of God’s warnings in Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” They fail to realize that not only does God see and remember, but that His justice demands instant wrath. His hatred of sin could not be greater. His mercy is in no way indicative of an any less than infinite abhorrence of evil. To think otherwise is blasphemy. A proper understanding of His mercy could not possibly lead to this conclusion. How fortunate for us all that God is great in mercy and patience.

Even in consideration of this, as sinful and evil as we may see ourselves, we can never fully comprehend just how wicked and unrighteous we really are. Because God’s holiness is beyond our conceptualization and because of our inadequacy to fathom the perfection of His government, we cannot realize the depth and debt of our rebellion against Him. Consequently, our hearts fall short in appreciating the agony which Christ suffered on the cross to pay for our depravity. In our natural selves before God, we stand naked of any righteousness, whereas, His presence looms radiant of unapproachable perfection. The completely filthy cannot approach the totally pure. There is no difficulty in seeing why it is by grace alone that we can come into the presence of God. “If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who can stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.” Though our sin is great, His forgiveness is greater still.

Knowing that mankind will all stand before God and give an account is an awesome consideration. Mankind, full of sin, will appear before the immeasurable holiness of God, before His light which penetrates every motive and thought, before His righteousness which demands infernal punishment. They will have evil recalled that they have even long forgotten. It will be for many the most fearful and dreaded of times. It will be a time when hope will flee forever and repentance will not be found, when anyone whose name is not found in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire. To be fully clothed at that time in the righteousness of Jesus Christ is a confidence of limitless comfort. Though our lives will be searched by the holiness of God, we can be secure knowing our justification is in His Son. Our account is the merit and standing of Jesus Christ. We shall not come into judgment. The most wretched of sinners can rest in the spotless blood of the Lamb. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” No now-not ever.

To a Christian, the awesome holiness of God should not be a motivation of terror, but rather of love. Because God cannot sin, His promises are secure and thus our salvation is secure. It stands not that God would not sin, but that He could not. Knowing that God would not break a promise should engender a heart of utmost reverence. Knowing, more so, that He could not, should plunge our worship into an ineffable state of awe and adoration. The Almighty God could not sin. His holiness, thus, not only guarantees eternal punishment for the wicked, but likewise, eternal security for the saved. “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He

said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken and will He not make it good?" For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes."

God commands us to be holy as He Himself is holy, yet we will never be satisfied with our own personal holiness. This is because we will always be gripped with our sinfulness as God continually reveals it. We will never, during the time of our stay upon the earth, reach a point where God has exposed all of our sin, leaving only for it to be finally dealt with. God will reveal only as much of it as we are presently able to handle. His delight is not in the exposing of sin, but in the triumph over it. He reveals sin not to just show us how evil we are, but to make us as holy as we can be. Our appreciation of the depth and intensity of our sin nature is small indeed. Its power, however great, cannot dominate that of the Holy Spirit's. Therefore, as we then learn obedience in those areas which we are now aware of, He can move us into the next. In this way we gain an ever clearer vision of our heart. Consequently, our hearts will always appear wicked and deceitful. It is a comfort, however, knowing that God will never reveal more than we can handle. If we are "hopelessly overwhelmed," it is because we have chosen to be and not because it was too much for us. We have become in all things overwhelming conquerors. The finite cannot claim victory over the infinite. The deceitfulness of sin cannot overcome the immense power of the cross and resurrection. The ability of the Holy Spirit regarding our sin is as the power of God regarding all sin. To believe this ability for the conquest at the cross and then to doubt it in our lives is not only inconsistent but arrogant. What God wants to do, God can do. The illumination of our sin provides but another opportunity for the ever majestic glory of God to be manifest. It is because we will always see our hearts as wicked that we must confidently remember the righteousness which God has imputed to us and the illimitable power of the Holy Spirit in us.

Nothing short of an understanding of God's holiness will lead to a righteous grief over sin. As previously stated, sin will never appear that bad when weighed against our morals. We love too much what God hates. Therefore, we must estimate the consequences from God's perspective. This requires a profound study and meditation upon the Holy Scriptures. The divine governmental implications of our sin tremendously transcends all that we know, all that we comprehend. Its effect on God surpasses even its effect on us to the degree that God is intrinsically holy and we are not. We suffer discipline; God suffers outrage. We reap corruption; God receives scorn. The infinitude of Christ's suffering is based not on the multitude of our sins, but on the intense sinfulness of it. When He dies, He could not have given any more or any less. He gave all; He gave Himself. How can we dare choose to sin when considering the goodness of God toward self-indulgent sinners such as ourselves?

Our few glimpses into heaven find the Lord being much adored and worshipped for His holiness. Isaiah heard the seraphim herald the glory of the triune God saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." As they did this, the thresholds trembled and the temple filled with smoke. Likewise, in the book of the Revelation, the victors proclaim, "who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou only art holy." Being in a world feculent with sin, we are unable to fully imagine the pure and immense holiness of God. It is an attribute both fearsome and comforting, awesome and practical. While it is the basis and the guarantee of the unrepentant sinner's just condemnation, it is likewise the believing sinner's security of eternal life. How we too can proclaim as David and say, "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness." The Lord is great and Holy is His name. May our thoughts of God be worthy of Him and may our hearts bow low in veneration of His majesty and greatness. "Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool for He is holy."

What does God's holy mean to us?

When we are saved we can be assured that our sins are not merely overlooked but are fully paid for.

No other attribute of God places such an impossible burden upon us. God's holiness demands nothing less than absolute purity every second of our lives and each time that we sin we now owe God and each sin puts us further into debt. God's holiness demands payment which is why God could

not merely pretend that the penalty is gone. But we can never pay off this debt. That is why on the cross Jesus had to pay for every person's sin debt. So when a person is born-again she can be assured that all of her sin's debts have been completely and forever forgiven.

We are safe and secure in His promises.

We do not have to fear that God will ever break His own commands. When we think about God's holiness and eternity we generally think about people having to go to Hell, but do you realize that it is God's holiness that guarantees that the saved will go to Heaven? God's omnipotence guarantees that no one will ever be able to tear us out of God's hands, but it is God's holiness that guarantees that God Himself will never cast us out.

He expects us to be holy also.

1 Peter 1:15-16 reads, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.'" God wants us 1) to recognize sin, 2) to not sin, 3) to hate sin, and 4), when possible, to act against sin. We recognize sin primarily through the Bible. We not sin by controlling what we think, guarding what we take in, and watching our actions. We learn to hate sin we understand the consequences of any particular sin and not just focus on its pleasures. We can act against sin in numerous ways from standing with the oppressed, feeding the hungry, saving the lost, and the list goes on.

We will never need to stop becoming better

Our lives are full of sin that will take more than one lifetime can clean up. Therefore, as we grow as Christians we will never come to a point where we can let our guard down or feel that we have "made it." Every day there is a challenge to clean up yet another sin. That may sound tiresome but each time that we triumph over another sin we are becoming more like the character of God.

Answers to quiz

- 1) c
- 2) a
- 3) a
- 4) c
- 5) a
- 6) b
- 7) a
- 8) c
- 9) b
- 10) a

Discussion

Situation

Jill has been a Christian for quite a while but every once in while when she is confronted by temptation she readily gives in to it and sins. Her explanation is that God promises to always forgive and so once she confesses her sin and repents it is completely wiped out. Therefore, there is no problem and if anyone points out that sin then that person is being judgmental since God no longer remembers it. Keeping in mind God's holiness, how would you explain to Jill that her reasoning is flawed and that her behavior is destructive?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's holiness means to us?
- 2) Why is it important to us that God is holy?
- 3) How can we learn how to hate sin?
- 4) What are some practical things that we can do to become more holy ourselves?
- 5) If God is infinitely beyond us and incomprehensible then how can we even study His attributes? Is not that contradictory?
- 6) Are there degrees of holiness or are the only two choices that a person is completely free from sin and therefore holy or still a sinner and has no holiness at all?
- 7) What are some obstacles to a person desiring to be holy?
- 8) Why, when we first get saved, does God not just make us completely free sin for the rest of our lives?
- 9) If we have been doing well overcoming a sin in our lives but then slip up once does that mean that we have to start all over again as though we had not made any previous progress?
- 10) In my quest to become holy why should I not compare myself to others?

THE SOVEREIGN GOD

How well do you know God's sovereignty?

- 1) The sovereignty of God means
 - a) that He is the greatest in importance, power, and authority
 - b) that one day in the future He will reign over all creation
 - c) that even though there are other competing authorities, He rules as the greatest
- 2) Authority can come from
 - a) God alone
 - b) God or the Devil
 - c) God, the Devil, or human institutions
- 3) Because God is sovereign
 - a) He controls and causes everything so there really is not such a thing as free will
 - b) He can prevent or cause whatever He wants but usually allows us to make our own decisions
 - c) He does not force us to do anything but nearly always causes situations to occur in such a way that we almost always do what He wants in the long run
- 4) The fulfillment of Biblical prophecy is based on
 - a) God's foreknowledge of what we will cause the future to be like
 - b) God's causing that result regardless of our action
 - c) Hoping that we will not do something unforeseen and ruin things
- 5) God's sovereignty
 - a) cannot overcome our stubborn, willful sinfulness
 - b) can justify those who were once corrupt, glorify those who were once depraved, and save the doomed
 - c) can be hindered by the Devil
- 6) The sovereignty of God
 - a) causes sin
 - b) is totally controlling and causes all things
 - c) can turn any situation to His will if He so chooses
- 7) The presence of sin and evil means that God
 - a) is not in control
 - b) has left for a while but will return one day to reign as King and set everything right
 - c) has always been the King and will, in His perfect time, fulfill His perfect plan
- 8) Ultimately those who will bow before God are
 - a) Everyone
 - b) Only those in Heaven
 - c) No one because in Heaven God will not need to be worshipped
- 9) When we exalt our will or desires above God's desires
 - a) we are committing Satan's sin of self-exaltation
 - b) God just laughs because He knows how puny we really are
 - c) He will always adjust His plans to align with our own
- 10) That God is sovereign should cause us to
 - a) be confident in His promises and rejoice
 - b) not worry about it because it does not really have anything to do with one person
 - c) give up trying and let God take care of everything

Contemplation

The concept of the divine sovereignty embraces the truth that it is God who reigns supreme as the greatest in importance, power, and authority. This term, as applied to the Most High, does not

merely denote Him as preeminent but, much more, to be the inclusive source of all authority. The Lord has the right and power to command, establish laws and standards, exact obedience, and then judge on the basis of these. He is also free to delegate authority as it so pleases Him. As Romans 13:1 avidly states, "For there is no authority except from God and those which exist are established by God." A proper understanding of this attribute should convincingly dispel any notion of the Almighty as being a distant observer of the affairs of men. It is not that He will reign, but that He does reign. He will not become King; He is King.

One of the most awesome statements is that God is in the heavens and does whatever He pleases. For the many times that this is declared, there are no added conditions, no qualifying statements. Man's pride may add such qualifications, but this reality will stand eternal. Through prayer and obedience, we may actuate God to accomplish what would have otherwise failed or been neglected, but we can never achieve or prevent that which the Lord has contrarily determined. We may think ourselves to be in a position where we can frustrate God and, thwart His plans, but scripture must be accepted as literal and unaffected, "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." Can we bend what He has straightened? Can we move what He has fixed?

God's supremacy does not mean that He merely prevents matters from degenerating uncontrollably, but that He causes what He wants to occur. He controls affairs to the degree necessary to achieve His desired end. Man does have choice and free will, but that freedom is always superseded by God's greater desires and goals. The choice which man has is only that afforded him by God. This measure of self-determination is our privilege and not His obligation. His ultimate purpose in everything is to glorify Himself, and to achieve this end, He has decreed innumerable subordinate ends concerning nations, times, and people, and He directs these so that the exact end is reached when and how He decreed it. "Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure... Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."

When contemplating the illimitable sovereignty of God, we must not equate it with that of an earthly ruler or king. These earthly rulers, at the most, set forth their rules and then appoint magistrates to enforce them, punishing those who do evil and disobey and rewarding those who do good through obedience. God's commands are not arbitrary dictates; they are absolutes. His goals are not mere hopes; they are total assurances. He does not relegate Himself to work around the misdeeds of His creation but uses even the wrath of man to praise Him. His control is consummate. He functions as more than a law-giver and subsequent enforcer; He controls, He destines, He plans, He accomplishes. God is not merely a know all who does nothing nor is He just a manipulator of circumstances-He truly does whatever He pleases. His sovereign reign does not consist exclusively of providing direction, but He is in absolute control of that which is necessary to achieve His declared purpose. His preordination is not merely the result of Him foreknowing what course we would chose. He does not declare as certain that which we have chosen, but that which He has chosen. His unchallengeable decrees stem forth from what He knows should happen, not from His knowing what will happen. He is omnipotent; His purpose will be accomplished on the earth. He eternally reigns as the supreme King. Let us fearfully never lose sight of this.

The sovereignty of God is perhaps most dramatically seen in how He has ordered world history. He has declared, through prophecy, the events and attitudes of the end times, and we can be confident that they will occur exactly as foretold because He reigns. All past prophecy has been dogmatically fulfilled; the future shall be also. This area is indeed one of the greatest evidences for the divine inspiration of the Bible. If God decreed an event to occur, it will come to pass. The entire outline of history of all existence has been preordained and man is powerless to change it. An examination of world history and the Bible leads us to the same conclusion as Nebuchadnessar in Daniel 4:34-35, "For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can

ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?'" It is God who "changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes king." Since no might exists apart from God, through what agency might He be hindered? Who can deceive the omniscient and who can overcome the omnipotent? Though the nations shall stand together to oppose the Almighty, their annihilation by His terrible wrath is swift and certain. They shall prove unable to even minutely delay His predetermined plans. The Christ will establish His visible reign on the earth and we will reign with Him. We must guard our hearts from underestimating the eternal, sovereign reign of God.

The sovereignty of God permits Him to accomplish whatever He pleases. He can utilize the consequences of man's wretched sinfulness to His own praise and glory. What man has hardened, God can call. What man has corrupted, God can justify. What man has depraved, God can glorify. He will choose the foolish to shame the wise and the weak to shame the strong. Indeed, the stone which the builders rejected became the chief cornerstone.

To be in total control is not synonymous with totally controlling. Though all of His purposes are and will be achieved, much is left to the choice of man. To say that God causes all things to work together for good is not the same as saying that God causes all things. He is not the author of sin; however, He is still always and completely in control. All good is from God; all evil is from man and the fallen angels. No mountain of sin is ever too high or too hard to be quickly ground to dust and removed. No temptation is ever too great that it cannot be escaped. No depression is too deep that it cannot be filled with the peace and joy of the Lord. Regardless of the situation, we must never underestimate God. He can accomplish what He desires.

Satan is called "the ruler of this world" (John 16:11), "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4), "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2), but it is the Almighty who is the "great King over all the earth" (Psalm 47:2).

As the world witnesses the international events and attitudes of its time, it concludes that God is, at best, an ineffective and apathetic observer. This judgment is generally based on world situations which are inconsistent with man's opinions of what the divine operations should be. "Suffering and pain should not be as prevalent. Famine and war, crime and hatred, these are the results of God's management of the earth? The violent slaying of an innocent man and a criminal going free, is this the justice of God? If there is a God, why then does He not act? Why does He not show Himself? He is not One who has distinguished Himself as concerned and certainly not as One who is deserving to be worshipped. The world situation is definitely not one which a truly loving and holy God would permit." This scornful attitude strikes at the very heart of man's evil nature—one of arrogance. What man is innocent? Who has suffered more than their sin rightly deserved? For what does the Most High owe anyone?

How naïve the wicked are to the calculated power of God. They draw their erroneous conclusions from the ignorance of a heart given to exalt the creature and neglect the day when they are confronted with the truth as God has decreed in Romans 14:11, "For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God,'" and again, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." None will scorn Him to His face on that day. None will complain; all will understand and all the wicked will be condemned.

The primary truth is that, "In the beginning God." This establishes the whole Biblical framework which we must realize and accept. From this declaration, all priority is defined. Nothing preceded God, and nothing shall usurp Him. What originally was the absolute remains authoritatively as the absolute. The superlative reign of God cannot be challenged. All power issues forth only from the Most High. He created all, sustains all, controls all. It is Jehovah who has planned, established, and executed according to His good pleasure. Job confidently asserted, "But He is unique and who can turn Him? And what His soul desired, that He does. For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such decrees are with Him." And again, Isaiah sublimely records, "Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, and informed

Him of the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust.”

To reject the supremacy of the Almighty is the sin of Satan, “I will make myself like the Most High,” and the subsequent deception of man, “you will be like Elohim.” The consequence of the fall is a heart of independence and self-direction. It is an establishment of goals and purposes apart from those of God, an experimental turning to our own ways and the establishment of self. This slanders all that God has said and forms the lie of man’s self-deification. Romans 1:25 says, “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” God’s order and government will not be mocked. He somberly warns, “‘Woe to the rebellious children,’ declares the Lord, ‘Who executes a plan, but not Mine.’” We must empty ourselves, as did Christ, and give our lives wholly to the obedience and glory of the Lord. We have the very significant choice of either solely seeking our own interests or glorifying the Almighty God. Therefore, we must be careful to never take lightly our choosing of goals and purposes.

All of His promises and warnings find their assurance in His sovereignty. He is wholly able to fulfill all that He has said, and no effort of man can nullify His word. Every one of His promises are fulfilled and when rebellion is not confronted by its immediate, just punishment, it is because God has been merciful and not because man has been astute. Both His promises and His warnings are our joy and should be considered with all seriousness and obedience. They are not mere suggestions, but are our insights into spiritual reality.

As independent as we may consider ourselves, the truth, of which scripture often reminds us, is that we are always servants or slaves to someone. We cannot serve two masters, but we will always serve one. Either Satan is working in and energizing the sons of disobedience-the unsaved-or it is the Holy Spirit in those who believe. As believers, we too have the choice of either presenting ourselves as instruments of unrighteousness or of righteousness, but we must choose only from these. We are creatures designed to obey. That God is Lord and that He does reign must be recognized. He is the true, eternal King and it is only His government that will last forever. Jesus Christ must be acknowledged as Lord in our lives, not only positionally, but also practically. We cannot escape authority; therefore, may it always be the Lord’s to which we submit in whatever form it is present.

Though the abundance of sin is exceedingly evident and the forces of darkness so prevalent and though Satan prowls about like a roaring lion seeking to devour, it is no indication that God has temporarily and voluntarily relinquished any of His authority. God is absolutely sovereign; He is as much now as He will be after sin and Satan are executed and the eternal state is established. His everlasting dominion has not been interrupted by this age of sin. What may appear chaotic to the eyes of man is instrumental to the mind of God.

To realize that God is fully and always in control should produce in us a heart of peace and security. There are no accidents or coincidences. He is the King who reigns on high and we are His people. The scriptures declare, “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” His power and authority are absolute and we have, only because He has given. Let our hearts be as Psalm 97:1 proclaims, “The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice.”

What does God’s sovereignty mean to us?

He is not merely a distant observer.

Jeremiah 23:23 declares, “‘Am I a God who is near,’ declares the LORD, ‘And not a God far off?’” God has His hand in everything so we can be confident that He is always in control and able to heal, provide guidance, support, encourage, and lead us in triumph. God is a king who is deeply involved in every affair under His rule. Even a sparrow can’t fall to the ground without God being aware of it.

God can direct and control whatever He wants

Romans 8:28 states, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Notice the key word "causes." God does not merely hope that the best path for us is available; He is able to cause it to be there if He so chooses.

We never have to be overcome by Satan or by any other evil or sin.

Nothing can keep us from doing what is right if we truly want to do what is right. We always have a choice of whether to sin or not to sin, but this is only because God is sovereign.

In medieval Europe a certain man's village was overrun by barbarians from the north, but having been a citizen of the Roman Empire he still wanted to live under the laws and culture of Rome. But he was unable to do so because the barbarians now controlled him and his village. He had no choice; he had to submit to the ways of the barbarians. In our spiritual battle if we want to serve God nothing can prevent that from happening because God is sovereign everywhere all of the time.

Answers to quiz

- 1) a
- 2) a
- 3) b
- 4) b
- 5) b
- 6) c
- 7) c
- 8) a
- 9) a
- 10) a

Discussion

Situation

George is not a Christian and every time that you try to bring up the Gospel his response is that he would never want to serve a God that allows such horrors as genocide, torture, and war. So if God really is in control, he will say, then He must not care what happens to people and so is not worthy of our worship. The only other option, he will continue, is that God really is not in control and so then how could He guarantee our eternal future? After giving it careful thought, how would you answer George's contention?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's sovereignty means to us?
- 2) If God is sovereign then why do bad things still happen? Does not this mean that He has relinquished at least a little of His power or authority?
- 3) How does knowing that God is in control help us in our struggles?
- 4) If God is sovereign then why did He allow sin into the world?
- 5) If God is in control then why does not He just come back now and set everything straight?
- 6) If God is in control then why do the wicked prosper and the righteous struggle?
- 7) What are some ways that we can give God greater control of our lives?
- 8) Why would we want God to be in control of our lives?
- 9) What is the difference between God's sovereignty and the sovereignty of a country's dictator?

10) Can you think of any examples of God's sovereignty being demonstrated in any of the people in the Bible?

11) What book in the Bible do you think might best demonstrate God's sovereignty and why?

THE DIVINE LOVE

How well do you know God's love?

- 1) When it comes to God's love
 - a) it is so obvious that we never have to think about it
 - b) we have to earn it
 - c) it flows from His being and is not the result of our actions and so is forever ours
- 2) God provides salvation
 - a) simply because He loves us
 - b) because a universal law obligates Him to do so
 - c) because He loves us and would be lonely without us
- 3) The best thing that God's love can give to us is
 - a) the best of everything that the world has to offer
 - b) no pain, sorrow, trials, or suffering
 - c) a relationship with Him and His presence
- 4) When the Bible says that we are accepted in the Beloved it means
 - a) that we are doing enough good things for God to let us into His presence
 - b) that every demand of sin has been met by the righteousness of Christ
 - c) that we are currently sinless
- 5) We should obey God and do what is right
 - a) so that God will love us
 - b) because God already loves us
 - c) so that God will love us more
- 6) When circumstances are going badly
 - a) it proves that God does not love me in particular
 - b) it proves that God does not really want us to have joy in our lives
 - c) we must draw even closer to God because we are confident in His unshakable love
- 7) John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world..."
 - a) and I can just as truly substitute "For God so loved me..."
 - b) but that does not mean that I can say that God notices and cares about me as just one person
 - c) but it would be prideful to think that I can apply that to myself
- 8) Because God loves us no matter what
 - a) we can always expect good from God
 - b) we can just sit back and let the blessings flow
 - c) we still need to do what is right in order to be open to His blessings
- 9) Because some people are more beautiful, richer, smarter, or luckier
 - a) it proves that God loves some people more than others
 - b) we are each one God's masterpiece created in the best way to know Him
 - c) that evolution is true, otherwise God would have to take a lot of blame
- 10) God's love is sacrificial and unconditional
 - a) and so that is how we should be towards other people
 - b) but He is God and we are human and so we are not expected to imitate His love
 - c) but He is not our example, good people are

Contemplation

Of all that God is, perhaps the quality most studied, most meditated upon and most cherished is His love. It is the theme that begins numerous gospel presentations. It is the subject of many Bible studies. It is that aspect of God which is most discussed and treasured. The unconditional love of God! How it fills our hearts with adoration. Nevertheless, it is also perhaps one of the most easily

doubted of all of God's attributes. We sing about it, we meditate on it, yet when we are tested, how quickly we forget it. He proved His love by giving His Son; still we demand more proof. He confirms it every day, but, even this never seems to completely convince us. We must learn to not merely talk about it, but to consistently and wholeheartedly believe it.

First of all, it must be realized that there has never been a point in time when God first began to love us. He has always loved us and He always will. His immense love for us is not bounded by time. Because He is omniscient, He has known all for all time. He cannot learn anything nor is anything new to Him. If our existence resulted from the process of evolution, then there could be no love until it evolved after us. But through creation, we could be loved throughout the eternity before us. His love was not initiated by our creation nor by some point of our conceptualization. We have always been in the mind and heart of God and, thus, we shall always remain.

An aspect of divine love which is greatly neglected is that of its own satisfaction in creating and saving lost men. The Lord does not save people out of some merciful obligation; He saves people because He wasn't to. The gratification which God receives through the salvation of a soul runs deeper and transcends even all the human benefits we receive through such an act. What we can too easily take for granted, the Most High cherishes so much that He will never let go. Though God does not need us, it is nevertheless true that He has chosen to delight in us. Though, in ourselves, we can add nothing to Him, we find ourselves to be the primary objects of His infinite love. Our salvation pleases the heart of God more than our own hearts to the degree that His understanding and love surpasses ours. Only God can fully esteem the value of the Sacrifice, the superlative position and the changes which occur in the one saved, and the eternal relationship and unity between Himself and man resulting from such an act. That which is wholly appreciated by the Almighty plunges our comprehension into the vast darkness of infinitude. What we minutely realize, the Savior infinitely relishes. How much the Lord delights in us! How much He superlatively loves us. We are not contemptible little creatures but the objects through which Jehovah God chooses to satisfy His illimitable love.

The Lord knows every one of our needs, and He understands all of our desires. Romans 8:32 reads, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" If He gave us His precious Son at such a great cost, then what distrust causes us to think that He would withhold less? He gave His best, demanding nothing in return; what makes us think we need to earn the rest? What God gives, God gives freely. This should not be misconstrued, though, to mean that God gives us everything that we want. Instead, we should understand that He gives us everything that we need. We are greedy creatures who are rarely satisfied with what we have and even more discontent because of what we do not have. We are often quick to present our list of demands and neglect our reasons for thanksgiving. But God is faithful and all of our needs are met through Christ. Philippians 4:19 promises, "And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." God's primary instruction to the unregenerate is that of repentance. Once the sin issue has been righteously and finally dealt with, He is then free to act as fully as His love wishes in our lives. What justice restrained, grace freed to be poured out gratuitously and superabundantly.

What God gives is not merely an extension of what the world offers, but that which is wholly new and different. He has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Indeed, the great issue lies no longer in the giving, but now in the receiving. We are blessed. And we are blessed with every spiritual blessing. Yet we still tend to beg for a few of the world's morsels even when the whole heavenly storehouse has been given to us. We ask for bread and water when a feast is already ours. The world offers a peace. God gives a peace without fear, without misgiving. The world offers imitations. God gives what is eternal and cost Him much. The world offers religion. God gave us Christ.

Too much emphasis cannot be placed upon the truth that the Most High has already given much more than we realize and vastly more than we appreciate. We have barely come to understand the tremendous riches of His grace which has been bestowed upon us. Who can truly realize the tremendous implications of being forgiven, the full potency of being justified? Is there anyone whose

heart is given wholly to the worship of God? The love of God transcends all that our minds can grasp. It transports us from knowing God to experiencing God. Who can contemplate the efficacious sacrifice of the Lamb of God and not bend the knee of reverent worship? "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" God gave because He loved. He did not give in order to love. This is the sublime declaration of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." The love of God is wholly unconditional. This means that it is dependent only upon its source and not at all upon its recipient. We shall be loved for as long as God is love. It is not contingent upon what we may become. He loves us now, regardless of what we may be, regardless of what we are, regardless of what we were.

To be without sin is to be pure. To be pure, while maintaining a deep hatred of sin is to be holy. To be holy and yet to die in order to pay for another's sin is t love. God has a tremendous drive to make us happy, and He has proven that He will stop at no obstacle to see that end accomplished. "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down His life for His friends." He did not die to prove His love; He died because He already does love. The very culmination of all human comprehension in its attempt to understand the meaning of the Holy One of God becoming sin is greatly surpassed by the immense reality and significance of the event. We, sinners by nature, should shudder at the prospect of becoming such an atrocity; how much more the Son of God. He emptied Himself, leaving His exalted and glorious estate where He received the continuous praise of all the host of heaven to become a worm, a reproach of men and despised by the people; to become the sin of the world. Truly, there has never been any greater manifestation of the love which one has for another. Should we compel our thoughts to ponder this tremendous reality we cannot but be moved by this awesome sacrifice.

One of the most sublime declarations in the bible is that in view of God's awesome holiness and its infinite contrast to our depraved and evil nature, we are, nevertheless, accepted in the Beloved. To be found acceptable to God necessarily implies that every requirement has been filled which He can ever demand against the sinner. Because of His immense holiness, even on stain, though ever so small and seemingly insignificant, would be just cause to incur the eternal wrath of the Almighty. His acceptance is not contingent on what we have done nor on what we may become. It is based on what we now are in Jesus Christ. There is no condemnation nor could there ever be because all have been redeemed, all have been reconciled, and God has been fully propitiated. We are gladly received into the fellowship of the Most High.

It is vital to realize that God's love and acceptance is never based on our performance. We perform to please God because we love Him, but never to win Him. We must understand that we cannot win God's love, and even more importantly, that we do not need to. If God so loved us unconditionally when He saved us, why do we often think that we must prove ourselves now that we are Christians? We do not enter into the presence of the King simply to be evaluated by Him, but to enjoy Him. When we were saved, we came to God confident in only His attributes and promises. As we now approach God, what leads us to reason that this relationship has changed? "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." Having been saved by grace and faith, are we to obtain perfection through works? We can draw near with confidence and boldly come into His presence, not because our lives sparkle with obedience and righteousness, but because of who He is and what He has promised to those in Christ Jesus. There was no excellency in our life which won us to God; how dare we to think that our performance is necessary to keep us there. This is perhaps one of the greatest barriers to freeing our hearts to wholly love God. We will always be hindered in our love if we concern ourselves more with trying to win His acceptance rather than believe it. Though the Almighty fully deserves to be served out of fear and punishment, He has chosen instead to be obeyed because He loves. He is not like King Ahasuerus as described in the book of Ester. Our favor before our King depends not upon our present appeal or works of righteousness, but wholly on the merit of Christ. We obey because God is good, not that we might appear good. Should our attention be focused primarily on the act rather than the object for which it is performed, then we will love more the praise for our actions rather than love to praise the One for whom our actions were intended. Our center of interest must be the Lord and not our Christian activities; however, we are obligated to obey

all of His commandments. Our greatest and most consistent motivation should be the belief that God loves and accepts us. "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

One of Satan's greatest deceptions is for us to believe that God does not really want to make us happy. Satan tells us that God's commandments are burdensome. He tells us that God does withhold good from the upright. He tells us that the more we give up for God, the less we will have. Satan is a liar and the father of lies, but how much we believe Him. It is amazing how easily we can reason from circumstances that God's plans are basically designed to make us miserable. We continually make the automatic assumption that if we want something, then it must be the best. Working then off of the absolute truth that God is sovereign and can do whatever He pleases and knowing that we do not always get what we want, often leads us to the conclusion that God really does not want to make our lives enjoyable. The results of this can be devastating. But as we grow in faith and in believing the word of God, we will become better trained in discerning good and evil, in discerning the truth of God from the lies of the devil. Thus, we become more likely to believe what God says rather than what our mind concludes. God does want to make us happy. He came that we "might have life, and might have it abundantly."

We must apply the infinite, unconditional love of God to ourselves in a very personal and real way. We must not deceive ourselves by merely saying, "God loves people" but to believe, "God loves me." The person who cannot truly say this has been deceived by perhaps one of the greatest lies of the devil. God demands repentance of this heart. It is to mock the Lord of all His words, all His works. Its root is not an attitude of inferiority, but one of prideful arrogance. Our God is a personal God who greatly desires a profoundly intimate relationship with each one of us. What evil causes us to withhold this from Him? To acknowledge that "God is love" is one thing, to believe, though, that "He loves me" is quite another.

It is amazing how quickly we can forget the good which God has done in our lives and how frequently we choose not to remember His abundant kindness. Psalm 106:8-14 is so typical a pattern. We find ourselves in adversity; God delivers us; we believe His words; we sing His praise. We then quickly forget His works and crave intensely. How much God blesses us. How many times He has delivered us yet how easily we forget. Hebrews 6:10 reads, "For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints." It is amazing how He is not so unjust as to forget our work, yet we forget Him.

The love of God is fully consistent with all that He is. Because God is holy, His love is pure; because He is just, His love disciplines; because He is eternal, His love is endless; because He is infinite, His love is limitless; because He is omnipresent, His love is always available; because He is omnipotent, His love is inseparable; because He is awesome, His love is immense. To experience the love of the Almighty is to experience all that He is. His love, therefore, cannot be completely described as similar to the human emotion but being much more so. A proper description must incorporate into it all that God is. The love of the Most Holy God is unique.

Though it is emphatically true that God immeasurable loves all men, it is equally true that only the regenerate can be the free recipient of its full, incessant surge. Isaiah 59:2 says, "your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God" and in Jeremiah we read, "your sins have withheld good from you." What love actuates Him to give to all, the sinful nature of man hinders and restrains. There is a vast difference between loving someone and being fully able to give them that love. But through grace, God gave His own Son to pay for our sins so that believing man can have eternal peace with his God. Thus, with the penalty of our sin discharged, the illimitable love of God is able to be experienced wholly and eternally by those whom He calls His sons and daughters. There is never any moment when God's outpouring of love is any less than the moment before nor can be any greater the moment after. The real issue lies, rather, with our desire to see and acknowledge it. When we question God's love for us, it is not that He has changed but that we have become dull. How easy it is for us to blame God. We grumble because we think that "the Lord hates us." To often, we listen

more to the devil's lies than to God's promises. It would do us well to memorize and devote much meditation to Ephesians 2:4-7. It avers the primary motivation which actuated God to plan and accomplish that which He did. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come, He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." How sublimely beautiful are the scriptures in their description of the Lord. The truth in this passage should never be forgotten. God is, indeed, good to us.

We must grasp the truth that the loving kindness of God extends to all situations and developments. An illustration of this is His personal fashioning of us. When He created us, He formed us exactly the way in which we would best be able to serve Him and others so that we could most fully experience His love. We read, "For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well." We are His work. All that God does, He does in love. Our appearance, intellect, and personality were each created carefully and skillfully by the Lord. He does not fully exert His love to us in some instances and allow "random chance" to rule in others. Indeed, no such principle as chance really exists. The point of any condition or situation is not just that God did it but that He did it in love. It is unbelief to assume that our life would be better if we were created any differently. We are each an individual masterpiece created by a loving Master.

The magnificent love of God! We may not fully understand why it is nor even fully understand what it is, but His love is real, is glorious, and is lavished upon unworthy creatures such as ourselves. What remains is for us to believe it and to praise God for it. "In this is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Considering the faithfulness of God should draw our hearts into a tranquil state of confident trust and peace. It abundantly reminds us of how good God is and how totally undeserving we are. We should all be able to recall many instances where this attribute has been demonstrated to us. It places the full glory upon God and engenders in us a rich devotion of worship. When meditating on this area, perhaps the most common theme contemplated is His loyalty.

What does God's love mean to us?

We can be free to wholeheartedly love Him.

What is one of the greatest hindrances to our loving God? It is thinking that we need to perform in order for God to love us. It is because we are then too focused on trying to win God's acceptance instead of simply basking in His pure, unconditional love. We obey because we know that God is good; not so that we might appear to be good. Should our attention be primarily focused on our act of obedience rather than on God for whom it is performed then we will more love the praise for our obedience than love to praise the One for whom our obedience was intended. We do not have to continuously validate God's love by circumstances.

One of Satan's biggest deceptions is to make us believe that God does not want us to be happy; that God is withholding good from us. Look at Satan's deception in the Garden in Genesis 3:1-5. "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden"?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" Notice what Satan is basically saying. "God told you that you can't have something because it would be harmful to you, but that isn't true. In fact, if you had that your life would be better. So go ahead and take it."

Other, perhaps more familiar variations on Satan's lie are: God's commandments are burdensome; God does withhold good from the upright; the more we give up for God the less we will have. We too often make the assumption that if we want something then it must be good for us so if God does not give it to us then He must not really love us. The results of this can be devastating. We lose trust. We lose faith. We think that God has let us down.

But then we have forgotten the one event that proved God's love for us. Circumstances may not be going our way but we can always look back to the cross. God did not become the sins of the world and die a horrible death and then become anemic in His love later on. When you are struggling and doubting the love of God do not judge God by circumstances that you do not understand; judge God by the one circumstance that you do understand and that is the cross.

When you blame God for how things are going in your life who are you listening to? –God or Satan? You can almost hear the devil whispering in your ear, "You really wanted that relationship to work out, didn't you? But it didn't. God doesn't love you." Far too many times we believe the Devil rather than God.

We can experience God's love for us in a personal and real way.

We must not deceive ourselves by merely saying that, "God loves people" but we must be able to say and believe that "God loves me." God did not die for a faceless mass of sins. God died for each one of our personal sins.

It is crucial that we remember personal accounts of how God loves us. Perhaps it is when He gave us courage to do something that we never thought that we could manage or when He answered a miraculous prayer or blessed us in a personal unique way. It is when we forget what God has done for us that we are prone to rebel, sin, and become bitter.

We can trust Him for how He created us.

Psalms 139:13-14 proclaims, "For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, And my soul knows it very well." Most of us do not particularly care for some aspect of how we look. But even though many of us could improve our appearance through exercise and a little better sense of fashion, our basic looks were created that way by God. All that God does He does in love. Our appearance, intellect, and personality were each created skillfully and carefully by God because that unique combination is what enables us to serve God the best, and when we serve God that is when we will find true joy.

Something about our appearance that we may see as a curse, God sees as an opportunity. God did not create us in a way to make our life easier; He created us in a way for us to enjoy Him the most.

Answers to quiz

- 1) c
- 2) a
- 3) c
- 4) b
- 5) b
- 6) c
- 7) a
- 8) c
- 9) b
- 10) a

Discussion

Situation

Amy has a terrible problem with feeling like she has no value or worth. She hates her appearance and thinks that everyone looks down on her. She was picked on while growing up both in school and by her parents. As a result, she struggles in her Christian walk since she does not think that she can do anything that anyone or even God will find useful. What are some things that you can say to encourage her and give her a new and victorious outlook on herself all the while emphasizing God's love?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's love mean to us?
- 2) How can a loving God allow someone's baby to suffer and die?
- 3) If God is so loving then why do so many people live in poverty?
- 4) If God's love is unconditional then why do we have to confess our sins?
- 5) What does the fact that God unconditionally loves you mean to you?
- 6) Give some practical examples of God's love in action in your own life.
- 7) Give some practical examples of how you can love others with God's love.
- 8) Why do not trials and miserable circumstances prove that maybe God does not love us right at this moment?
- 9) Why is it important to personalize God's love for us? I.e., why is not it good enough to only claim that God's loves everyone?
- 10) Why do we sometimes doubt God's love for us?
- 11) Are there times when God does not love us? Why or why not?
- 12) What are some practical ways that we can show God's love to other people?

THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS

How well do you know God's faithfulness?

- 1) When we sin
 - a) God leaves us
 - b) Is so disgusted that He turns His back on us
 - c) God remains with us
- 2) When it comes to God's acceptance of us as Christians
 - a) we must earn it
 - b) we must simply believe it
 - c) it comes and goes depending on how good we are
- 3) God's faithfulness extends
 - a) only to us getting saved
 - b) only to us getting saved and staying saved
 - c) to us getting saved, staying saved, and being perfected
- 4) To say that God is consistent means
 - a) that everything that He does is predictable
 - b) that every that He does is always completely compatible with who and what He is
 - c) that He always does things the same way
- 5) Since God is faithful
 - a) we can sin with impunity because He will never abandon us
 - b) we can commit the small sins with no worry but for the big ones He may choose to leave us
 - c) we should fear every sin because even though He will not leave us we will grieve Him and it will adversely affect our fellowship with Him
- 6) In pain and trials, God's faithfulness means
 - a) very little since pain can hurt a lot
 - b) that if we work our way out of it then God will be there waiting for us
 - c) God is there as a fortress, a comforter, healer, and guide
- 7) When it comes to temptation
 - a) God is always faithful to provide a way out without sinning
 - b) God passively waits to see what we will do
 - c) God will help us with the big ones but we are on our own for the small ones
- 8) God's promises are true
 - a) only if we believe them
 - b) no matter what because God said them
 - c) until God takes them back
- 9) When we are going through a particularly rough time
 - a) it necessarily means that we have sinned and God is punishing us
 - b) that God has left us
 - c) God is there to give us the power to endure and be victorious
- 10) When someone sins against us
 - a) we should forget about them because there are more "fish in the sea"
 - b) frequently remind them of that sin even if they ask for forgiveness because that will help keep them from committing it again
 - c) we should ever be ready to receive them back and to forgive them

Contemplation

The divine faithfulness can produce much needed rest by promising us that though God is certainly everywhere, He will never leave or forsake those whom He has called by His name. It

installs a confidence and a security in knowing that the most vital of all relationships depends wholly on God for its sustenance. We may reel, or we may break fellowship, but should we repent and choose to return, we can always be assured that the Lord will receive us.

There is many a believer who forsakes God, but there is never a believer whom God forsakes. As senseless and ignorant as we may become, as much as we may feel that we have been abandoned by God, and regardless of the decadence of our condition, we can always say with Asaph, "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee." We are constantly in the concern of the Lord God Most High. No matter how vehemently we may deny this or how circumstantially this may appear untrue, the truth of its reality forever stands firm. God cares for even the greatest of sinners.

The more we muse upon this majestic theme, the more profoundly significant it becomes. For example, it is not even the case of us holding onto God, but more importantly, He is holding onto us. "Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation, and Thy right hand upholds me; and Thy gentleness makes me great." Our security lies not in our strength, but in God's. It stands to reason that God would abandon us because of our constant sin, but if there ever was a reason for Him to leave us, then there never was a reason for Him to have been drawn to us. It can never be emphasized enough that God's seeking of us and faithfulness to us is never contingent upon any intrinsic value in ourselves; it rests wholly upon the immanent qualities of the One whom we call Savior and Lord.

If the Almighty God accepted us as unforgiven sinners, what could possibly induce Him to leave us as forgiven sinners? If he was attracted to us as aliens and hostile in mind, how could He abandon those whom He now calls His children? God has an immeasurable investment in us-that of His own Son. Though unworthy, we are not worthless. We are a source of tremendous gratification for God. Even in our rebellion, He does not simply wait passively for our return, but is constantly working so our eyes might be open to truth that we should once again properly acknowledge Him. And though ultimately should our work be burned up and we suffer loss, even then we shall be saved. The realization that God's faithfulness is not dependent in the least on our obedience or even on our reckoning of it is vital. We are so used to an economy of give and take that it is only with difficulty that we are able to accept the truth that God gives. Pride wants to earn divine acceptance; humility simply believes it.

This aspect of the faithfulness of God is perhaps most properly understood by considering our own state. If we were such creatures of excellence, then it would not be to the glory of God that He remain loyal to us because He might be said to be opportunistic, rather than faithful. We do not need to contemplate very long and hard to come to the realization of how deeply depraved and evil we are. And even then our clearest apprehension still does not appreciate the full magnitude of our state. Recognizing, too, that this is the God who hates sin and loves righteousness transcends our abilities to reason the divine faithfulness. But the necessity underlies the truth-it is our very sinfulness that requires God's faithfulness. His faithfulness is not merely an added blessing; it is a necessity. Even under the care of the divine Shepherd, our hearts are far too prone to wander. Seeing how we cannot be trusted to secure this tremendous relationship, the Lord has charged Himself with this great responsibility. In this rests our confidence.

Though sin may abound, God will always be committed to His original plan of redeeming and glorifying men. "What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, 'That Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, and mightest prevail when Thou are judged,'" and again, "and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these e also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." God is not only faithful to us, but to His purposes for us also. The above passage in Romans 8 lists no conditions, no qualifications. It stands out as a confident assertion from God. It requires not even belief in it per se. It is a faithful promise surely to be executed for the one who does no more then to believe in Christ Jesus. He will perfect what He began. He initiated-He will complete. Though His Spirit will not strive with men forever, nevertheless, so long as it is possible, He shall always desire for all to be saved.

Perhaps one of the most sublime and reassuring passages is 2 Timothy 2:13, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself." Our security lies wholly in the faithfulness of God. The permanency of our relationship with Him cannot be estimated by including ourselves in any part of the evaluation; it must be determined solely through the revelation which the Lord has given of Himself. Our confidence rests not on our ability to remain true, but in His immeasurable desire to be committed to us. Yet to say that He is faithful does not solely imply that He will never leave us, though this is true as stated in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." Also, He will never cease from His work of glorifying us. "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." What we shall eternally become has been predetermined by the Lord, and He shall never unto that which He has started. He has counted the cost; He shall finish the task. As has been previously discussed and warrants reiteration is the truth that because He is faithful and fully committed to us, we can be assured that we will become what He has promised.

Loyalty and commitment are generally thought of as the common manifestations of God's faithfulness, yet by definition, faithfulness also implies consistency. This is not, however, to be confused with His immutability. Immutability indicates that what God is will never change; whereas consistency denotes that what God does will always conform to that which He is. All that the Lord does is wholly compatible within Himself. There is always full harmony, full agreement. To say that God is faithful demands also that He be consistent. It is an aspect of the Lord that we often neglect and take for granted, yet our soul knows well that it is necessary both for our existence and eternal salvation. Were God inconsistent, we could not know of anything that would be sure.

Upon this truth, our hearts can rest, securely knowing fully that God does not change in His basic attitude and dealings with us. It is not just the comforting truth that He is always with us, but that He is always the same toward us. Though it is true that we can at once grieve Him with our sin and then immediately please Him with our obedience, His basic motivating attitude toward us does not change. He does not need to rethink His intentions; He can have no regrets about His actions. And though we may respond poorly to circumstances and about all of what He has said, we can forever be secure in knowing that He loves and cares for us. We lie in the hands of a trustworthy God. "For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us."

To say that God is faithful or consistent is not to imply, however that His is predictable. Much bitterness toward God results from a misunderstanding of this. Too often we speculate and try to guess the actions of God and, therefore, develop expectations. Through our limited and often perverted reasoning, we determine the "best" for our lives and then consider God's only reasonable response to be one of quick and complete fulfillment. We underestimate the desires of God. What we are convinced is the best, the Lord may deem as quite modest. Rather, He will do awesome things which we do not expect. As we cannot fathom the love and generosity of God, neither can we estimate His actions. His plans of gladness for our lives far surpass even our most creative imaginings and dreams. In this we must believe. "The Lord has done great things for us: we are glad."

Even when, to our perception, God has responded contrastingly to the conceivable same situation, He has in no way acted contradictorily within Himself. He is always faithful, always consistent. This extends to even the most basic attributes of the Lord. Why He seems to show mercy at one time and then executes sudden judgment at another is not within our finite grasp of understanding or reason. We must confidently accept the truth stated in Romans 9:15 and the basis of the affirmation of God, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." This passage should produce no fear or uncertainty in the one whom properly understands the Most High. Though He has the freedom to act as He pleases, this is always within the context of what He is. He can never act apart from His love, for example. To conclude in any situation that the Almighty Lord should have acted in an otherwise fashion is to have a pride and an arrogance that comes with a self-centered heart. The Lord always does the best so we might enjoy Him the most.

Unless God tells us otherwise, our reasons and explanations for divine occurrences are, for the most part, speculative. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” This passage indicates that God seeks out and pardons men who believe. What we do not understand through reason, we must believe and trust through faith. This concept of God’s unpredictable ness should not be a matter of insecurity for us. We know that He will do us good; the present question is just how will it be this time. “Surely I believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord.”

In John 15:11, Jesus Christ tells us, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” He expresses that He wants to see in us the same joy that He has in Himself. This is clear enough; however, the paradox lies in The subsequent events to follow in His life. He proceeds to speak of how the world hates Him, rejects Him, and persecutes Him and when He has finished the Upper Room Discourse, the Prince of Peace is then betrayed, tried, and crucified. The One is truly meek and humble of heart is mocked and spit upon by the criminals for whose crimes He is willfully paying. Is this the joy God wishes on us? The issue lies not in the despairing circumstances, but in the attitude of delightful dependence on a faithful Father. Situations will change, adversity and fortune take their turns in our lives, and hope is deferred, but God does not change. He is faithful. He is the fortress in whom we may rest, the strength for those who are weary. Godly joy is not based on circumstances; it is based on God.

Typically, our nature identifies favorable situations with God’s concern and displeasing conditions with His apathy or, if our hearts are especially wicked, abandonment. We are far too prone to judge our God on extrinsic circumstances rather than believe the ineffable revelation He has given concerning Himself. What God is, is consistent with what God does. Conditions, whether favorable or displeasing, should always stir our hearts to seek the living God, be it for praise or counsel or refuge. It is always He to whom we should run first and foremost. Rather than allow circumstances to be as a hedge of thorns, we should use them as a means to further glorify the Lord. We must not read the circumstances into God, but learn to read God into the circumstances.

There is an aspect of the divine faithfulness which is easily overlooked-that of providing opportunities for persecution, for hatred, for affliction. “Before I was afflicted I went astray.” “I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are righteous, and in faithfulness Thou has afflicted me.” An unappreciated aspect of God’s consistency is in refining our lives and bringing us closer to the image of His beloved Son in our daily experience. All of the promises of a trouble-free life without hurt are reserved for heaven when we shall be without sin. It is then that we shall forever rest from our labors. Till that time, however, we must be prepared to suffer persecution from men and to suffer discipline from men and to suffer discipline from God. Through this means, perhaps more than any other, He refines stubborn people such as ourselves to become more like Himself. The Lord is good to be so faithful to us. We strongly tend to grumble and complain. Instead, we should believe and obey.

How pitiful the Christian who lacks the motivation to be like Christ and in doing so, not to glorify the Father. Indeed, he should not be pitied, but reprovved. Our lives have been bought to glorify God, but we are prone to wander. Affliction can draw us back to this kindness of the Lord. God is so good to constantly take care that our hearts do not grow fat and dull, as is their nature. He grants us the honorable privilege of daily taking up the cross of Christ. In reality, we are unworthy to even suffer shame for His name, let alone to bring it glory. Our eyes must be ever fixed upon Christ and not on the storm around us. It would become us all to develop that attitude of Job after his many afflictions. “Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?”

In 1 Corinthians 10:13, we read one of the greatest promises given to those desiring to lead a holy life, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.” In this, we find a tremendous hope in our quest to overcome evil-the faithfulness of the Lord. We sin only because we have willingly chosen to do so. We shall never have a justifiable excuse to transgress the commandments of God. Satan no longer reigns over the children of righteousness. Though our senses may swarm with the presence of evil,

we can always find escape in the still greater presence of the Lord. We can always confidently assert as the apostle Paul, "The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Our confidence rests in the faithfulness of the Lord. He has declared Himself to be wholly and eternally committed to His people. Should we be faithless or rebel against His holy character and government, He will, nevertheless, remain unconditionally faithful to us. All we have needed, God has provided. This relationship with God, though sometimes unappreciated and neglected on our part, will forever be precious to the Lord. He will accomplish all that He has promised us. To consider our shifting attitudes and moods and then to realize the amazing consistency of the Lord should leave us in awesome wonder. All that He does, finds its source in all that He is. Though unpredictable, He is completely trustworthy. He is good to us and despite the discouragement and perplexity of surrounding circumstances we can always find hope in His tremendous love. What god is like our God? "Remember my affliction and wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The Lord's loving kindness indeed never ceases, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness."

What does God's faithfulness mean to us?

Security of salvation and God's presence

Psalm 18:35 emphatically states, "Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation, And Thy right hand upholds me; And Thy gentleness makes me great." If you are walking with a child and he is holding your hand then he can let go at any time and run away and never come back. But if you are holding his hand then he cannot go very far. He may tug and pull but as long as you are holding on securely he will stay safe. We are not holding onto God; God is holding onto us.

Romans 8:35-39 lists a number of things that cannot separate us from God. Why cannot anything separate us from God's love? It is because God is the one responsible for it, not us and God is faithful. This means that we can never lose our salvation, that our place in Heaven is secure, that no matter how much we sin God is always faithful, and that God will always love us no matter what happens.

This should instill a confidence and a security in us knowing that the most vital of all relationships depends not on our behavior or attitude but completely on God for its continuance.

God's faithfulness means that we can say along with Asaph in Psalm 73:21-23, "When my heart was embittered, And I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before Thee. Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand."

Even in our sin God is faithful. No matter how sinful we may be God is always faithfully waiting for our repentance. And when we do repent God will take us back with open arms ready to restore us. If we commit a really terrible sin and then a year later decide to repent and come back to God we will not cry out "God? Hello? Where are You?" Instead there will be God's arms eagerly waiting to embrace us and welcome us back just like the Prodigal son.

He is in the details of our lives.

When we think of a faithful friend we think of someone who is devoted to us and who cares about what is happening in our lives. God is our Lord and our King, but in John 15:15 He announces a relationship that is startling, "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you." God wants us to be intimate with Him. He has shared a great portion of His heart, thoughts, and desires with us in the Bible. As we read the Bible we quickly discover that it is not a manual but an autobiography and that its author is calling us to share ourselves with Him at all times and in all ways.

Confidence that our sin can always be cleansed

1 John 1:9 is one of the Bible's most powerful promises, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In the Scriptures, God's faithfulness is tied to His promises. He will always do that which He has said, "For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us."—2 Corinthians 1:20. And what is one of God's promises? "And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."—Hebrews 10:17.

Why is God righteous or just when He forgives us? We associate justice with punishment; not with forgiveness. It is because Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the entire sum of the penalty for our sins. And then because the Father raised His Son from the dead, it showed that He fully accepted Jesus' payment for sins. The risen Christ is proof that God will, indeed, forgive us of our sins. So when we confess our sins, God must forgive us or He will not be righteous and just.

God is always ready and available to comfort and protect

God is a constant presence in our lives. He does not go away to attend to more important business. He is always ready to hear our personal prayers, to comfort our intimate pain, to strengthen us when we falter, and to guide us when we are confused. The phrase "I am with you" or a close variation is repeated over 20 times in the Bible. Psalm 91:4 provides us with a strong promise, "He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark."

Allows us to resist temptation

1 Corinthians 10:13 promises, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." Sin never sneaks up on us because God is not watching. Every temptation is noticed by God and, even more so, He actively and always provides a means for us to escape that temptation and avoid sin.

The world tells us that we do not have our fair share and so we should do whatever we can to get it. The world tells us that we are not paid enough so taking a little from the company is justified because it really owes us anyway. The world tells us that one quick look will not do any harm. The world tells us that since we do not really care for that person that it is OK to gossip. But because God is faithful, His grace is always available to give us the power to resist those temptations. Grace reminds us that righteousness always pays better than sin even if it takes a little longer.

Answers to quiz

- 1) c
- 2) b
- 3) c
- 4) b
- 5) c
- 6) c
- 7) a
- 8) b
- 9) c
- 10) c

Discussion

Situation

Elizabeth's father abandoned her family when she was eight years old. As a result she has had a hard time keeping friends. When she feels that someone is getting too close to her she will say harsh

things to that person and become distant. She is often lonely and many times it is obvious that she longs for a close friendship. You have been getting close to her and you are starting to see her doing the same thing to you. The other day she insulted your clothes and you have left several friendly but unanswered messages in the last two weeks. When you started to get to know her you knew that she is like this and you promised yourself that you would stick it out and show her that you are a loyal friend. You know that she is hurting and that her behavior is a defense mechanism to avoid being hurt, but it is difficult to endure the growing insults and cold shoulder. You decide that rather than pull away from her like everyone else you will talk to her. What will you say to her and can you incorporate God's faithfulness into your discussion?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's faithfulness means to us?
- 2) How does knowing that God is faithful help us through difficult times?
- 3) Is God still faithful to us when we are in sin or does He leave us only to return when we repent?
- 4) What are some ways that God has proven His faithfulness to you personally?
- 5) Who are some people in the Bible that God proved His faithfulness to?
- 6) If God is so faithful then how come some people claim that in their darkest hour they felt as though God were not there at all?
- 7) If God has promised to be faithful no matter what then why cannot we use that as an excuse to do whatever we want?
- 8) What is the difference between God's faithfulness (God will never leave nor forsake us) and God's omnipresence (God is everywhere)?
- 9) What are some practical ways that we can be faithful to other people the way that God is faithful to us?

THE DIVINE MERCY

How well do you know God's mercy?

- 1) Mercy is
 - a) compassion towards those who are afflicted or in rebellion
 - b) a desire to give the very best for the longest amount of time
 - c) being able to see spiritual matters clearly
- 2) Mercy
 - a) cancels out the eternal debt of a sin
 - b) lessens the eternal debt of a sin
 - c) delays the eternal debt of a sin
- 3) Suffering and affliction here on Earth
 - a) can substitute for divine judgment
 - b) if bad enough can get someone into Heaven by itself
 - c) has no affect on the penalty of our sins
- 4) The immediate negative consequence of our sin on the Earth
 - a) can be delayed or eliminated by mercy
 - b) will always occur no matter what
 - c) can be delayed by mercy but will catch up to us eventually
- 5) The free gift of salvation
 - a) has nothing to do with mercy and is purely an act of love
 - b) is a combination of God's love and grace but not mercy
 - c) is the supreme act of mercy
- 6) God is rich in mercy towards us because we are rich in
 - a) sin and affliction
 - b) obedience and good deeds
 - c) complaining and whining
- 7) When we do not get mercy
 - a) we should demand it
 - b) realize that in view of our sins that we cannot complain
 - c) we should realize that God has abandoned us and beg Him to come back to us
- 8) Mercy allows us
 - a) time to repent
 - b) to sin more with impunity
 - c) forget about that sin since nothing bad came from it
- 9) When someone sins against us
 - a) we should always be merciful and forget about it
 - b) we should always expect them to make up for it big time
 - c) consider if the situation would best be served by being merciful and then be so if it does
- 10) When God has shown us mercy we should
 - a) repent of our sin and worship Him
 - b) try to figure out what caused His mercy and do it again so that we can get more mercy
 - c) do nothing because it was God's choice and not ours

Contemplation

In undertaking this great theme of divine mercy, it might be best to distinguish several of His attributes, these being: His mercy, His patience, His love, and His grace. All emanate from the same inexhaustible heart; all are richly lavished upon His children. They are worthy of our greatest praise, deserving of our deepest meditation. No person can grow in understanding of these areas without drawing nearer to God.

Mercy is the compassion of the Most High as directed toward objects of misery and affliction. Patience is long suffering toward objects of rebellion. Love is the motivation to give the very best for the utmost longest and underlies all of His actions. Grace is the action taken by which He bestows all that His love actuates Him to do. Of these, the only one necessarily restricted in full application to His children is that of grace. It can have no unrestrained function until the holy demands against sin have been satisfied. The others have most definitely been experienced by all mankind. No man can correctly assert that God has not shown them mercy or patience or has not loved them unconditionally.

Mercy can be proven in God by His withholding the immediate consequences of our sin. "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." What we deserve and what we receive may be two entirely different things. It is not, however, a removal of judgment. Retribution must always be the wages of sin. Payment is ultimately necessary, be it Christ on the cross or us eternally in hell. Mercy can never substitute for the divine payment required for our transgressions.

It is vital to understand, also, that suffering in this present life does not substitute for the torment required in hell for sins. Any present affliction pales in comparison to the torment in hell involving infernal punishment and complete, eternal separation from God. The hopelessly damned will consider their greatest misery here to be a relief compared to what they are doomed to in hell forever. The divine judgment for sin cannot be equated nor satisfied by any present affliction or misery. To think otherwise has led to the profanities of asceticism and penance. God has said, "Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings for sin Thou has not desired, nor hast Thou taken pleasure in them." The purpose of Christ is that "By one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." To introduce personal affliction into the scheme of salvation is not merely to underestimate the impact of sin upon the holiness of God, but to slander all of His promises regarding grace. The total requirements fulfilled by the spotless Lamb of God cannot be accomplished in whole or in part by any condition or endeavor by us.

There is a tremendous difference between what we presently reap from our sin and the immeasurable divine judgment demanded by an outraged and holy God. The first effects its consequences in the present sphere of time and life; the second requires eternity. One functions on the principle of reaping what we sow; the other is consequent of intensely offending absolute holiness. The former has no bearing on a person's judicial position before God. As all stand either wholly condemned or wholly justified, there can be absolutely no degrees therein. The latter is our judicial poison before the Almighty. Mercy may preclude the first, but not the second. Though both are sin, they cannot and must not be combined. To do so denies the necessity of the absolute vicariousness of Christ's death. The first all experience; the second is reserved only for the unregenerate. The remission for the first is mercy; the remedy for the second is only believing on Christ unto salvation. Specific repentance may often remit the former; a turning to God from idols is necessary for the latter.

This distinction is evident in the position of a Christian. Though we are totally free from the divine judgment required of sin, we are not necessarily released from its present consequences. If we sow to the flesh, we will reap corruption from the flesh, but we shall never come into judgment. We experience discipline and we are called to zealously repent of our transgressions. We are no longer slaves to sin, but we still will often yield to temptation. All of the divine requirements for the penalty of our sin have been met by Christ; however, that same sin which was crushed on the cross with our Savior may still have present consequences after we commit it. It can have no influence, though, on our eternal merit. It is vital for the believer to recognize this distinction. The concept of paying for our sins, in any way whatsoever here and now, is a gross misunderstanding of scripture and of God. It is an extreme, grave example of pride and demonstrates a greater perversion and misjudgment of the wrath exacted against our rebellion. That wrath is as great as His ineffable holiness is to our sinful nature.

Mercy alone can never remove the divine penalty for our sin. If this were possible for one sin or in one instance, then it necessarily would be for all. This being the case, then Christ would not have

been required to die and, therefore, would have been the spotless Lamb of God given in vain. However, the crushing of the Savior for our iniquity was an act of infinite mercy toward us. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come, He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." And again, Titus 3:5, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." The giving of Christ for our sins was the supreme act of mercy. God witnessed the pain and torment of man and so provided the ultimate solution—the free gift of eternal life. It could have been by no other way.

Divine mercy heard "the groaning of prisoner; to set free those who were doomed to death." Satan would "not allow his prisoners to go home" but the omnipotent Savior said "to those who are bound, 'Go forth!'" It is to God's supreme glory that He was not deaf to our groaning, to our deserved state. We were the prisoners. Compassion freed us who were wholly impotent to liberate ourselves from a cruel taskmaster.

The testimony of the Scriptures clearly proclaims this great truth of His mercy. With deep veneration, Mary averred, "My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him." Zacharias likewise, declared of his son's calling, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." And Peter writes to the churches, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The mercy of God is stupendous in its reality to His saints. Those whose hearts have been enlightened to the goodness of the Lord proclaim "O praise the Lord, all ye nations; praise Him all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Praise ye the Lord."

Mercy can never be earned. Its very necessity is evoked by unworthiness, not by worthiness, else there would be no need for it. Because we have sinned, we need mercy not because we have obeyed. The only qualification for mercy is affliction. We are a weak and fearful people. Our worldly foundations can crumble quickly. We can easily despair and lose hope. Our constitution may be considered to be at best frail. God is rich in mercy because we are rich in affliction. Mercy flows from a heart of infinite love and compassion unto those of despairing and deserved misery. Scriptures says that "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." The Lord is not cold and calculating but is an intelligent being who fully realizes the condition of His creatures. As a result, His affections are directed by His ever loving sovereignty, "'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who gains, but on God who has mercy." It must again be emphasized that mercy cannot be earned nor deserved. No excellence on our part elicits its application. Rather, its dependency lies in the greatness of God. We are its unworthy recipients. This, however, should produce no insecurity since our God is the Father of mercies" who is "rich in mercy." Our confidence, as always, rests in the greatness of God.

If God does not show us mercy in a particular situation, on what grounds do we have to dispute? Lamentations 3:39 reads, "Why should any living mortal, or any man, offer complaint in view of his sins? Who whom and in what way God shows mercy is justly determined by Him. The need for mercy is brought forth by the effects of sin and rebellion. How perverted the creature who sins against His Creator and then demands and expects mercy from the just consequences of such. As has been emphasized much, our condition should be much worse than it is now. The attitude is often, "Why dost Thou stand afar off, O Lord? Why dost Thou hide Thyself in times of trouble, rather than humbly

confessing?" "I have sinned against the Lord." How dare we think that we should be allowed to continue in the deceitful pleasures of our sin and then expect mercy when the despairing consequences result. We are called to repent and obey, not expect and demand that which we do not deserve.

Not all affliction, however, is directly resulting from transgression on our part. Adversaries will come against the Lord's people. The righteous are persecuted. The wicked will always seek to abuse the children of God. In these instances, the affliction arises from righteousness rather than from sin. The scriptures abound with such incidences and 2 Timothy 3:12 promises, "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Here too, though, the divine mercy seeks out the troubled to give rest to their souls. The Lord is a fortress, a refuge, a shield. Even a casual reading of the Psalms should impress our hearts with this reality. The mercy of God is the salvation of His people from the storms of adversity. Though all may roar and shake around us, we shall always stand firm on the strong foundation of Jesus Christ. "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee. In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?"

The unregenerate man stands before the Almighty without righteousness, without understanding, without seeking God. This person is useless, doing no good. He is alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds and though He may bitterly deny it, he stands on nothing save the love and mercy of the Most High. His destiny is one of agonizing terror forever in utter darkness apart from God, apart from hope. He deserves nothing better than to be hurled instantly into hell as his just retribution. The intense, bitter torment of Gehenna is his fate. He is wholly impotent to alter this destiny. It is what he has earned. What stays the execution? By what means is the doomed preserved from perishing? The scriptures herald, "For His merciful kindness is great toward us." The damned, instead of getting what they deserve, may be given the opportunity to stand forever in the presence of the High and Holy God. Condemnation may be wholly replaced with justification. Shame may be replaced with glory. Hell may be replaced with heaven. This is pure mercy. A destiny of being forever with God in wholehearted worship with the host of saints and angels rather than stark, abject fear alone forever in darkness-this is pure mercy. "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." God's response to the repentant who is clothed with sin and shame is, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and the one that comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." This person is us. The Lord has shown us unsurpassed and tremendous mercy. How can we not worship a God such as this?

Our attitude of expectation and greed is truly amazing. God has blessed us with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," but we cry out for more. He has promised to supply all our needs "according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus," but we complain that we are unfulfilled. He promises that "in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary," but we demand immediate results. God is so exceedingly good to us but we refuse to trust Him and to be content. How often in our troubles has He been here to help. He is indeed "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction." We must learn to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need." "You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful."

"It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord saying, 'For He is good; for His mercy endureth forever,' that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God." May our hearts be always like this.

What does God's mercy mean to us?

Aligning ourselves not with the advantageous but with the lowly

Many times in church you can see people line up in front of the pastor to tell him what is going on in their lives and there is not necessarily anything wrong with that. But if there is someone sitting by themselves or who is hurting or who is on the low end of society do we ever see people lined up in front of them to minister to him? This would be called mercy.

Much of Jesus' life was filled with opposition, ridicule, and disbelief, but there was one time where the crowds were behind Him cheering Him on. He was about to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey while they screamed, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 20:29-34). In this midst of all of this fanfare there was an interruption. Two blind beggars who could not even see the sun in the sky managed to stop the Son of God. There may be times when we are on our way to doing something great for God, but then someone who is needy interrupts us. When things are going poorly there is always the danger of focusing on how circumstances are affecting us and when things are going well there is always the danger of being caught up in the rush. Jesus did not get blinded by this. He never forget those who were hurting. There is always time to stop and show mercy.

In Matthew 25:35-40 we see an amazing fact about God. He associates with the lowly, with the poor, with the hurting, with the sick. When a king is parading in all of his regality before his adoring people God does not look upon him and say, "That's my boy!" But a dirty beggar who is crying out for pennies so that he can live; who has been outcast from society and is covered with sores; this is the person that God sees and says, "There I am along side that person feeling his pain." When Jesus came to the earth He didn't experience riches and pomp. He wept in the dust with sisters whose brother had died. He touched a leper whose life was worth less than nothing to most people. Who were the people that Jesus associated with? –A widow whose only son was dead, a woman with a hemorrhage for 25 years, a paralytic who had to be carried on a stretcher, two blind beggars on the side of a road .

There are people begging for mercy all around us. Do we step over them while going to church?

Because of the necessity of God's mercy we can never demand anything from God

Mercy is not a nice extra that God provides. Because we are so sinful it is a necessary favor. God's mercy directs our eyes from ourselves and what we think we deserve to falling vulnerable on the mercy of God. What does God owe us? Who are we that we should blame God for anything? We are sinners. We should not be demanding blessings from God. Instead, we should be begging from God His mercy.

Though we should fear sin we do not have to be obsessed by avoiding it

Throughout Christian history there have been groups of people who went to extremes to avoid contamination or temptation by sin. God does call us to holiness and to avoid even the appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22) but not to the degree that it stagnates the rest of our lives.

Though it is not a license to sin but God knows who and what we are and understands that we are weak and will sin. Psalm 78:38-39 reads, "But He, being compassionate [merciful], forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; and often He restrained His anger and did not arouse all His wrath. Thus He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and does not return."

It is because God is merciful that we do not have to spend our every waking moment trying to avoid sin but can focus rather on being holy.

Answers to quiz

- 1) a
- 2) c

- 3) c
- 4) c
- 5) c
- 6) a
- 7) b
- 8) a
- 9) c
- 10) a

Discussion

Situation

Philip is a good friend of yours and is a Christian, but he has a short temper. If he feels that he is being slighted or wronged in even the most minor way he becomes furious. He becomes insulting and threatening and will hold a grudge forever. He will do this even in public with strangers. He is estranged from both of his parents and once had a very short-lived marriage. There have been a number of times that he has blown up at you, but since you know what he is like you just brush it off and do not take it personally. Lately, though, he feels that the leaders in the church that you both attend have slighted him by him by not asking him to co-lead a ministry in an area that is very dear to him. As a consequence he has confronted several of them in a way that was overly hostile. One of those leaders took you aside last week to tell you that the church is thinking of asking Philip to leave. You know that should this happen Philip will explode and cause all kinds of problems in the church. You are the only person whom he trusts and so you feel that it is your responsibility to help him with his anger problem. Would you tell him about what the church leader told you? Why or why not? What would you tell him about how to control his anger? What can you tell him about God's mercy that might help him?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's mercy means to us?
- 2) How do you define God's mercy?
- 3) Why is God's mercy important?
- 4) Describe some real examples of God's mercy in your own life.
- 5) Why is it important for us to show mercy to others?
- 6) What are some ways that we can show mercy to others?
- 7) Someone is always complaining about how God does not do what he or she wants. How does the fact of God's mercy rebuke this attitude?
- 8) What are some people in the Bible that God showed mercy to and how?
- 9) When someone sins against you should you always initially show mercy?
- 10) Someone says to you, "My brother who always led a clean life went to a party, got drunk, and had sex for the first and only time in his life. He later died of AIDS because of that one time. Where was God's mercy there?" What would you say?
- 11) Are mercy and justice completely incompatible?
- 12) What is the difference between mercy and forgiveness?

THE DIVINE GRACE

How well do you know God's grace?

- 1) Grace is
 - a) God freely giving us His riches
 - b) God's patience towards sinners
 - c) God blessing those who deserve it
- 2) Grace allows us to
 - a) do every good deed
 - b) sin and not suffer the consequences of it
 - c) do what we want to do no matter what
- 3) God is gracious
 - a) simply because He chooses to be
 - b) because we deserve it
 - c) only when we ask for it
- 4) Salvation results from
 - a) grace alone
 - b) grace along with good deeds
 - c) grace along with good deeds and good character
- 5) Becoming more like the character of God
 - a) requires grace and desire and effort on our part
 - b) is left totally to us
 - c) is pure grace without any effort on our own
- 6) When God says in James 4:6 that He "gives grace to the humble" it means that
 - a) humility obligates grace
 - b) the formula to be guaranteed grace is to start with humility
 - c) humility only enables us to receive what God alone chooses to give
- 7) If we do not live in grace then
 - a) we simply will not receive God's blessing but all else will be OK
 - b) we will not receive God's blessings and we allow an opening for sin to ruin us
 - c) we will lose our salvation and go to Hell
- 8) We sometimes resist grace because
 - a) we are prideful and want to accomplish and get things totally on our own
 - b) we are doing fine and do not really need it at that time
 - c) we do not know that it is there
- 9) Our response to grace should be
 - a) giving more money to the church
 - b) gratitude to God and worship
 - c) nothing since it is God's choice
- 10) What we often substitute for grace is
 - a) mercy
 - b) faith
 - c) law

Contemplation

The theme of grace is so glorious and magnificent that any proper contemplation of it should bow our hearts in full adoration and awe. The idea of grace most clearly reveals and manifests the unfathomable and dreadfully awesome heart of God. Grace is the influence and provision of God upon one wholly undeserving. Its very nature demands the unworthiness of the recipient. It, too, imposes no recompense. Indeed, grace motivates, strengthens, and drives the believer in obedience

and eternally rewards him for such an action. It is amazing in its quality and powerful in its application. To be without it, none could be saved and to neglect it, no believer can stand. It is unlimited in its resources and free in its giving. It asks only for the humble person who is willing to receive it.

God was never extrinsically compelled to love us; however, He unconditionally chose to do so. Thus, His love depends not upon the merit of the recipient, but upon the magnificence of the Giver. Because of this irrevocable truth, God cannot be satisfied until He has done all that His omnipotence and sovereignty desires for us. It is His infinite pleasure to give us all good things for all time. "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly." In this, He has given His only begotten Son and upon the application of His work, He glorifies us so as to be like Him. What greater demonstration of love can anyone show than the supreme sacrifice of all that he had so to give all the more? "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" It is the superlative grace of the Most High that makes this possible.

Once the barrier of sin has been removed, God is free to deal with us as He truly pleases. Because of grace, the love of God may be poured out unhindered, unrestricted, infinitely, free to give. Grace transforms the desire of God into the blessing of man. It takes the infinite storehouses of God's riches and opens it wide to be lavished upon His people. It is grace that takes "For God so loved the world" and gives us His "only begotten Son" and then it is grace that draws and enables us to believe on Him so that we should "not perish but have eternal life." Grace takes all that God is and has and bestows it freely and eternally upon sinful man whom it has transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. So great is this theme that, as Ephesians 2:6-7 states, God "raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Though now that He is unconditionally able to give, the only issue remaining is the willingness on our part to receive. God gives grace only because He wants to, not because He has to. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." He is under no obligation or debt to give. That He does is always His choice and determination. But we can be confident that to us grace will superabound in every deed and situation. Does He not say "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it"? Second Corinthians 9:8 reads, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." We have the surpassing grace of God in us.

Again, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the very qualification for grace is unworthiness. Its very nature demands that it be unmerited. In ourselves, we are nothing less than wholly depraved and evil. Indeed, to call us merely unworthy is much too flattering. Not only did we refuse good, but we eagerly pursued and embraced evil. We devised our own idols and wholeheartedly worshipped them. While we feigned sincerity, our hearts seethed with bitterness and contempt. Deception ruled our lives and Satan had no issue because we were his. It was never that we chose good, but that God restrained us from doing uttermost evil. All our righteous deeds were as filthy rags. Our minds strain in trying to comprehend our true wretchedness. There was absolutely nothing in our lives which could be found pleasing to the Lord God.

Romans 3:10-18 describes the divine viewpoint, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless, there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." These are the qualifications for saving grace.

Jesus Christ did not die for righteous men. He died for enemies. In this lies much more the glory of grace. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." How arrogant must our hearts be to even consider that we deserve or merit grace. The holy scriptures make the emphatic declaration that salvation cannot be on the basis of works and grace. Indeed, it is because of our works that grace is so necessary our works are evil. In every

aspect, in every area of our lives, grace is essential for salvation. We are sinners through and through. Grace is not merely a complementary aid to help us in obtaining our goal; it is a vital necessity essential to every aspect of God's program of salvation.

Grace effects the tremendous changes in a person that God's holy attributes desire. Grace takes "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" and makes them "vessels of mercy" prepared for glory. Grace takes the prospect of "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" and changes it into one of, "And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever." Grace delivers us from the domain of darkness and transfers us to the kingdom of His beloved Son. Grace takes those who are alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds and reconciles us that we might be presented before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach. Grace takes the ugly and worthless and makes it beautiful and precious; from a life of shame to a life of glory; from "lawlessness resulting in further lawlessness" to "being transformed into the same image from glory to glory." The influence and provision of grace is so immense that it can truly be proclaimed. "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

If we only more fully comprehended the extent of our rebelliousness and gross sinfulness in our unregenerate nature and, in infinite contrast, the gloriousness and righteousness of our renewed position, our hearts would bow in adoring worship for the God who effected this change. From what we were to what we have become lies an infinite gap. This distance is commensurable to that infinite which spans gross sin and divine righteousness. Because we cannot properly comprehend either extreme, this separation even more so lies outside of our capacity of full appreciation. Man is unable to rise even out of what he is, let alone reach the transfinite heights of the Almighty. Such a transferal can be accomplished only by the insuperable power of the Almighty. It is naught by man's ability that can bring him; it is neither within his power to return. The impotency of man is overwhelmed by the sufficiency of grace. A man cannot separate himself from his transgression as far as the east is from the west-grace can. A man cannot leave his mundane abode and seat himself in the heavenly places-grace can. A man cannot exchange his earthly tent for an eternal mansion-grace can. Grace accomplishes beyond what man dreams.

A Christian is not simply a forgiven sinner; he is much more. What the Lord God has already made the believer in Christ is far more majestic and glorious than even our most spectacular imaginings. Only an in-depth study of the scriptures will reveal the immeasurable depth of the riches grace has given to us. The Lord has given us blessings and changed us in ways that natural reason could never deduce. Indeed, these things do not become reality upon our acknowledgment; they are already reality. Upon our salvation, they were applied to infinite completeness. Only through revelation might we realize such tremendous themes as sanctification, redemption, reconciliation, adoption, and forgiveness.

How blessed is it to know that we are no longer children of the devil; how much more precious is it that we are now children of God. How reassuring is it that we are no longer slaves to sin; how much more fulfilling is it that we can now be instruments of righteousness. Great is our forgiveness; greater still is our justification. The adoring heart can find no end to its praise of our magnificent God.

Being forgiven and justified and made partakers of the divine nature does not obligate grace to us, but we are now in a position to experience that which we could not experience before, namely the full and unhindered blessings of God. Again, the very nature of grace demands that it be unmerited. Human pride strives to make us believe otherwise. James 4:6 reads, "God.... Gives grace to the humble." It is so easy to think that grace is the reward of humility as though grace is "earned" by being humble. We have, in our minds, added James 4:6b, "for the wages of humility is grace." Humility does not earn grace; instead it is accepting the free gift God has given. We earn death; we receive grace. Humility is an attitude of dependence on God. It is a proper recognition of our total impotence and insufficiency apart from Him. Pride would rather eat bread and water procured by its

own devises than feast at the table of the king by way of unmerited invitation. Pride merely survives; humility lives abundantly.

Our desire of wanting to do good does not make us holy; grace makes us holy. Our attitude, though, must be one of humility and dependence to receive that grace. Our responsibility is to obey; God's responsibility is to determine the results. We sow, and He provides the harvest. Fruit is of the Spirit, never of ourselves. The source of all good is God. The direction of all praise is to the Lord also. We need grace as much to become Christ-like in practice as we did to become His children. Grace makes us experientially what we already are positionally before God.

How easy for us to think lightly of all that the Lord has done for us. Grace gives us what we need, changes us into what we could never be, and transports us to places where even the angels cannot dwell. Our response to divine grace must be one of humility. We must learn to relinquish our pride and to reject its deceitfulness. Pride is a departure from reality and finds its "pleasure" only in self. Its gain will only be that which the flesh can produce. It is evil and the source of much sin. The Lord does not delight in the soul of the one who is proud. But as we grow in understanding scripture and the ways of God, we shall develop a heart that more properly recognizes spiritual reality and, therefore, grows in humility.

By accepting the provision of grace we are open to the untold riches of God. It is in "grace in which we stand" and it is in grace in which we must remain, lest we succumb to the bitter, evil motives of our flesh. "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled." To believe on Christ unto salvation and then to not live a life given wholly to Him is to neglect one of His greatest benefits, that of being directed and influenced by the grace of God. Though eternally saved and adopted as the people of God, we, nevertheless, still have an evil nature. This nature, though judged at the cross, will not be executed till we depart from this world for our heavenly home. Without the divine influence of grace, there remains nothing to prevent this evil nature from predominating. We are warned of the consequences of such negligence in the above passage and, indeed, throughout the bible. We are a people prone to sin. It is the love of Christ that controls us. To act apart from the grace of our Lord is to perform what is properly called the "deeds of the flesh." Sin is never worth its accompanying price. Leanness of soul is a tremendous cost for self's greedy desires. The more a person is willing to be wholly led by the Lord, the greater the experience they will have of His glorious and unimaginable riches.

We are only as joyful as we allow ourselves to be. It is evil to think that if only God would do more then we would be happy. God has done and will continue to do all that is necessary to make our lives abundant. God's past, present, and future dealings all lead to the end that He might receive all glory and that we might have all joy. Therefore, the question lies not with God, but with ourselves. He has given us life, He has given us hope, He has given us Himself. All that God is, has been lavished upon us that we might experience the vast sum of His riches. This wealth surpasses even our greatest wishes. Though distressing circumstances will come, they are always greatly surmounted by the super abounding grace given to us. We have all that we need. With grace, no commandment is beyond our obedience, no promise is outside of our experience. But though the provision of God is abundant, we are often deceived by our disposition to self-pity. We are the only ones responsible for the condition in which we are. We already have the magnificent promises of God, we just need to believe them.

"But if it is by grace; it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." Probably the most dangerous intrusion into the principle of grace is that of law. As Christians, we are in the age of grace. We stand in grace and walk in grace, yet, like the foolish Galatians, it is all too easy for us to put ourselves under law. The principle of grace and that of the law stand opposed to each other in such a manner that their mixing produces only law; grace is nullified.

Under law, the human obligation is first presented in order to receive the consequence of the divine blessing. Under grace, the blessing has already been obtained; therefore, the human obligation follows. The one under the law does in order to become; under grace, we have already become; therefore, we should do. The motivation of the law is to obtain; the motivation of grace is because we have already obtained. The law says, "Now it shall be, if you will diligently obey the Lord your God,

being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you will obey the Lord your God.” Grace says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Therefore.... Walk in a manner worth of the calling with which you have been called.” Under law we must do a work to be accepted; under grace we must believe the work that has made us accepted. The law promises, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God;” grace assures us that we are sons of God; therefore, we should pursue peace. The law warns, “For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” Grace encourages, “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” The fulfilling of the law was necessarily pursued by all that the natural flesh of man could produce and was doomed to ultimate failure. The heaven-high demands of grace, rather, are accomplished by the mighty enablement of the indwelling Spirit. “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.”

In Ephesians, chapter one, we read, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us.” The scriptures emphatically declare the glorious and superabundant excellence of divine grace. It is necessary for salvation; it is required to walk according to His will. It is given without recompense to a wholly undeserving people. Indeed, so great is this theme that the throne upon which the Almighty is seated is called “the throne of grace.” It opens wide the tremendous storehouse of God’s riches and lavishes them upon an unworthy people. Grace finds its source in the profound heart of God and its effect upon the undeserving heart of man. “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God or Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace; comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.” Amen.

What does God’s grace mean to us?

It heals shattered and broken lives

Proverbs 3:34 says, “He gives grace to the afflicted.” Grace takes “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” and changes them into “vessels of mercy” prepared for glory. Grace takes a life broken by sin and changes it into a life rich in righteousness. Grace takes someone who is confused and has no hope and changes it into a life that blesses others. Grace takes the ugly and the worthless and makes it beautiful and precious. Grace allows us to proclaim, “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”—2 Corinthians 5:17.

Matthew 12:22 tells an interesting story, “Then there was brought to Him a demon-possessed man who was blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw.” This verse is often overlooked because it is setting up the well-known confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees where Jesus says “And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?” But in this one verse was a real story involving a real person. This was not Jesus walking along a road and saying, “Oh, what a pretty stone. I think I’ll take it home,” and then plunking it into His pocket. This blind and dumb man was a real human being. When the wind whipped coarse sand into his face he had to protect himself with the ragged sleeve of his cloak. Someone that he knew heard that Jesus was in the area and so they brought him to Jesus. We do not know if he was terrified or if he came eagerly, but we do know that Jesus healed him. We read the rest of this story and marvel at Jesus’ answers to the Pharisees. But what about this healed man? Did he calmly stand on the sidelines and watch? He was probably screaming out, “I can see! I can see!” and eyes that couldn’t see the light of the sun were now flowing with tears of joy. He might have grabbed the nearest person by the shoulders and yelled, “I can see you!” and then the next person, “And I can see you, too! This old stick in my hands; this was my cane?” And he threw it to the side.

And he rejoiced and danced and yelled out praises to God in the Highest for maybe the first time ever. And for the rest of his life everyone heard for the 200th time the story that went, “And then He touched me and I could see and I could speak!” That was pure grace.

We can become more like God in our character

Do we want more joy in our lives or maybe more self-control or patience? Grace allows us to acquire the fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” All of these characteristics transcend circumstances.

We can always do the right thing

2 Corinthians 9:8 says, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.” We never lack the power to do what is right.

There are many times in all of our lives when someone said something that was insulting, offensive, or hurtful. Our immediate reaction is usually to strike back. Sometimes we want to nail him on the jaw, lean into to his half-conscious face, and yell, “That’s what you get for saying that!” Or we want to trade insult for insult or revert to name-calling. But always, always, always we are glad when we do not react that way. The right thing is to swallow that insult, be calm, and listen to what he has to say. If necessary, we might bring it up later in a less agitated manner and discuss how we thought that he was wrong, but most of the time it is better to simply let it go. We can always be gracious even in the midst of sin.

Avoiding sin, though, is only one side of doing right. God’s grace enables us to do every good deed. We can share the Gospel with that person who is lost. We can bend down to help the oppressed whether it is at a food kitchen or helping those who have been displaced by war. We can become involved with the children’s ministry at church. We can reconcile those who are at enmity.

Notice all of the emphatic words of completeness in this verse.

“**all** grace”

“**abound**”

“**always** having”

“**all** sufficiency”

“in **everything**”

“an **abundance**”

“**every** good deed”

And, of course, this verse starts with the ultimate word for completeness—“**God.**”

Gives us second chances

Probably most of us are familiar with the story of Jonah. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and the Ninevites were a wicked and cruel people. God told Jonah, who was a prophet, to go to that city and preach repentance. It says in Jonah 1:2, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.” But Jonah did not want that city to repent; he wanted them to suffer the full blow of God’s holy wrath. So Jonah took a ship going the opposite way of Nineveh. God sent a storm and the ship with all of the crew on board was on the verge of sinking, but Jonah confessed that he was the cause of the storm and so the sailors threw him overboard and the storm subsided. Then a giant fish swallowed Jonah, but while inside the fish Jonah repented and the fish spit him up on the shore near Nineveh. So Jonah preached, the people of Nineveh repented, and Jonah was unhappy.

So how is this a story of grace? First, God showed grace to the Ninevites by giving them a chance to repent before being punished for their sins. This is true for each one of us today. We are all sinners and as such we deserve immediate and terrible judgment. But God was gracious and merciful and provided us with the chance for salvation.

Second, God showed grace to the sailors. He could have destroyed their ship. It said that every man cried out to their own god so they were all idolaters. For obvious reasons that did not work so then they cast lots. God does not promise that He will honor something as crass as casting lots to discover the greatest sinner among us, but in this case God did honor the lot. It enabled the sailors to discover who was to blame and so allowed them to save their ship and themselves. That was grace.

Third, Jonah was in the fish but it did not digest him. That was mercy and when he repented he was put back onto the shore.

But perhaps the biggest display of grace was in Jonah 3:1-2, "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.'" God "came to Jonah the second time." Jonah rebelled against God's clear command and even tried to run away. So God disciplined him and Jonah repented. But here is what is amazing about God's grace. When Jonah was on the ship or inside the fish or even when he was spit up on the shore all covered with fish juices God could have given up on him. Chapter 3 could easily have started out, "Now the word of the LORD came to Micah saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh...'" But it did not. God graciously gave Jonah a second chance.

God tells us not to be angry; we're angry. God tells us not to lust; we lust. God tells us to serve others; we think only about ourselves. But God is gracious and He comes to us a second time and says, "Don't be angry," or "Don't lust," or "Serve others" and then He gives us the power to do it.

It is everywhere, in the small things and in the large

In Genesis 11 a group of people got together to build a huge tower that would reach far up into the sky. It was an enormous project that required a tremendous amount of planning, coordination, and hard work. It was the Tower of Babel.

In Mark 12 a widow dropped the equivalent of one cent into the temple treasury.

Which required God's grace—The great building project or one cent in the treasury? It is clear that it was the widow's cent. In the big project God Himself had to stop the work on it least the people became proud. For the widow's offering Jesus Himself used it as an example of faith.

Grace is not measured by the grandeur of the project but by its obedience to God no matter how small or how mundane.

It fills up what we are otherwise lacking

This is evidenced in two ways: 1) in overcoming our weaknesses and 2) in giving us spiritual gifts.

One of the more emphatic Scriptures is 2 Corinthians 12:9, "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." When God is working through our weaknesses it even more obvious that it is His power and so brings more glory to Him.

You do not need grace to do nothing, but God will give you grace when you step out to do His will. The Red Sea parted only after the Israelites started to walk across. Peter was able to walk on water only after he stepped out of the boat. Moses got the Ten Commandments only after he went up into the mountain. The unnamed servant of Abraham found a wife for Isaac only after he went out. Weakness stays weakness when you do not do anything; power can only come through action.

We read in Romans 12:6-8, "And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." When someone is saved, God gives that person the Holy Spirit and one of the benefits of the Holy Spirit is that He gives to each one of us at least one spiritual gift that enables us to be a useful and necessary part of the church.

Answers to quiz

- 1) a
- 2) a
- 3) a
- 4) a
- 5) a
- 6) c
- 7) b
- 8) a
- 9) b
- 10) c

Discussion

Situation

You have been good friends with Eric for quite a long time. You have always admired his zeal in sharing the Gospel and being involved in church ministries. He is a great student of the Bible and always seems to have the perfect Scripture for a situation. One characteristic of his that has always caused you to bite your lip and has caused contentions between him and others in the church is that he holds to a very narrow way of how anything should be done. He has argued with the music director because he thinks that all contemporary music is not glorifying to God and so should never be sung in church. He has contended with people doing outreach because he feels that they are not doing it the one proper "Biblical" way. And on a nearly weekly basis he argues with the pastor because he feels that every sermon should contain a reference to Hell and the judgment of God. You feel that Eric is isolating himself from others. Using God's grace as the theme what can you say to Eric that might help him understand the methods and ways of God more clearly?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's grace means to us?
- 2) Define grace.
- 3) Why is it necessary for us to realize that grace is only given to the needy and the humble?
- 4) What does it mean to be humble?
- 5) What is the difference between working and works? Give some examples if that will help.
- 6) What are some examples of how God has been gracious to you?
- 7) How does grace allow us to develop the character of God or the fruit of the Spirit?
- 8) What are some ways that we can ignore grace?
- 9) Can you tell us about any experiences where God's grace allowed you to do what was right even though you would have rather have done otherwise? How did you feel afterwards?
- 10) Can you tell us about any experiences where God's grace allowed you to resist temptation? How did you feel afterwards?
- 11) Can you tell us about how God's grace may have filled up some area of your life that was lacking?
- 12) What are some practical ways that you can demonstrate God's grace to other people?
- 13) Is there a connection between grace and being gracious?

THE DIVINE PATIENCE

How well do you know God's patience?

- 1) Proof of God's patience is that
 - a) He tolerates us
 - b) He did not cast us into Hell the first time that we sinned
 - c) Even though He does not know us well, He still endures us
- 2) God's patience is best seen through our
 - a) sin and rebellion
 - b) suffering and affliction
 - c) persecution and martyrdom
- 3) God's patience is necessary
 - a) only until we get saved
 - b) all throughout our earthly life
 - c) all throughout our earthly and Heavenly lives
- 4) Patience and power
 - a) have nothing to do with each other
 - b) are connected because patience actually triumphs over power
 - c) are connected because God's patience is a demonstration of His power
- 5) Regarding God's patience
 - a) when we sin we can expect it
 - b) it is applied as He so chooses and so should not be taken for granted
 - c) it can be obtained by following the correct steps
- 6) When God disciplines us
 - a) it is because that is what is the best for us at that time
 - b) it means that His patience has run out
 - c) it proves that God is not all that patient to begin with
- 7) When we do not get what we want when we want it
 - a) we should finally realize that God does not really care about us
 - b) we should realize that God waits on high to give us good and so should be patient ourselves
 - c) we should complain incessantly
- 8) When it comes to other people's sins
 - a) we need to ask God for His grace for us to be as patient towards them as He is
 - b) we cannot be like God so we should just follow wherever our heart leads us
 - c) it is always better to demonstrate divine wrath rather than divine patience
- 9) Being patient
 - a) always implies long-suffering
 - b) is easy if you just grit your teeth and mumble under your breath
 - c) is always easier for other people
- 10) The more we realize how patient God is
 - a) the more we can feel free to sin
 - b) the more we should be thankful and worship
 - c) the less we have to be patient ourselves

Contemplation

Of all the divine excellencies, God's patience is perhaps the most abused. It is all too easy to think lightly of the riches of His long-suffering. We expect God to be patient while we continue in sin and enjoy our evil habits. It is incredible that the Most High should choose to suffer at all because of His rebellious creation, let alone to suffer long. Most of us have no reasonable choice when we are

forced to be forbearing-God does. His long-suffering is our privilege and not His obligation. We take time for granted. We think we deserve much of it and are owed a long and happy life. It is this heart of arrogance that leads to our ungratefulness. We expect instant reward for obedience and eternal deferment of our sin's effects.

The very heart of God's patience is a response to, as are so many of His qualities, our sinfulness. What is it that we deserve? For what reason in ourselves should God not have quickly terminated our lives and hurled us into eternal damnation? He needs us not. Any instance of the Lord's patience, be it in scripture or experienced personally in our lives, is a tremendous tribute to Him. That sin is not quickly judged and executed is a reality which our reasoning cannot adequately answer, but which our spirit can certainly wholeheartedly worship the Almighty for. That God is good, there lies no question. Instead, it is the unimaginable extent that draws our hearts to wonderment. Our minds can stretch to recall all that the Lord has done for us. We can muse all His works and praise Him for what He has given, and still we would only touch on the fringes of His overwhelming goodness toward us. We do not now and perhaps may never fully understand all of the great benefits we have obtained because God has been patient with us.

The patience of God may be defined as an admirable endurance of a trying or offending situation or person which emanates from a heart of understanding. It must be distinguished that God does not merely tolerate us, but that He is patient toward us. The distinction lies in that patience stems from understanding, tolerance does not. God rebukes the heart that says, "He has no understanding." He knows we are weak and frail and though His patience should never be identified as a condolence of sin, He nevertheless does understand. He fully realizes that though He is eternally and immutability perfect, we do require time to grow and mature. He is a God who has tremendous compassion on a sinful people. A most sublime description of the Lord Most High is that of Psalm 103:8-14, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness. He will not always strive with us; nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His loving-kindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." Our hearts cannot fathom the greatness of our Lord, One who does not rule tyrannically like so many lesser men but with loving-kindness and compassion. How we should bow low in reverent worship for such a God.

The distinction between mercy and patience is often difficult to discern. Both are similar in the function of withholding just punishment but differ in the nature of the object to which each is directed. Mercy finds its respect toward the afflicted; patience is exercised toward the rebellious. Mercy seeks to heal and restore; patience is more synonymous with long-suffering. The greatest recognition of either, though, lies not so much in proper and concise definitions, but in appreciation of their tremendous significance in our lives. Neither is a secondary theme, but both are venerable and glorious aspects of the Lord's dealings with us. It requires no difficult contemplation to realize how immensely patient God is with us. We are usually generous in providing many opportunities for its application.

The divine patience is truly amazing when reflection is upon the consistent rebellion of creation toward the Lord. The angel who had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty, who was anointed to guard the very holiness and glory of God rebelled. His initial creation of man, given a single restrictive command, disobeyed. A nation chosen and blessed given so much by the God of their covenants became idolaters. His apostles denied Him; His church neglects Him. Those whom He has redeemed and regenerated grieve Him. After a reign of peace, the nations will gather to fight Him. Yet He still loves all and cares for all, devising good plans and desiring to be in intimate fellowship with all. Never has He given up; never has He regretted dying for us though the sacrifice was great. He seeks people such as us as the primary gratification of His great love. Year after year, He longs for a right heart. Our present existence and salvation is a tremendous tribute to His long-suffering.

It lies beyond our capabilities to fully appreciate the patience of God because we do not rightly grasp His holiness nor our sinfulness. If we even minutely pictured the intense outrage our sin has on the Holy One and the terrible wrath that it demands, we would fearfully bow low with much trembling and thank the almighty God for enduring sinners such as ourselves. This divine attribute is best understood when we realize that we are not immediately punished as our transgressions merit. Much of the Lord's relationship with us is one of giving. This we can more easily personally experience. But to not receive what we rightfully deserve penetrates more into the realm of supernatural knowledge. We know what we did not get because scripture tells us what we should have. But even then, we fall vastly short in full appreciation because we cannot realize, while still in our fleshly bodies, just how many things we have each done that required the Lord's forbearance.

Isaiah 30:18 says, "Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who wait for Him." The remarkable fact of the divine patience is that it always functions in seeking our good. He waits to be gracious, He waits to have compassion, He waits for repentance. The truth of so mighty a God waiting for anything is indeed amazing. We rush to sin; He longs to apply grace. Through and through the Bible, the "perfect patience" of God is most exemplified by His withholding His deserved wrath and allowing us time to repent. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance." He tarries in bringing us home so that He might bring the most possible. He is under no obligation to wait for anyone but He does, and consequently, we have benefited much.

The patience of God can be readily identified as a manifestation of His awesome power. In Nahum 1:3, we read, "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." And Numbers 14:17-18 says, "'But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as Thou hast declared, 'The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness.''" Through the demonstration of His long-suffering, the Lord Most High exercises self-restraint. He, being a person and not a machine, exercises His attributes and actions not automatically, but on the basis of intelligence and reason. Though sin does call for immediate justice, the personality of God may demonstrate patience instead. He can, not only perfectly control His creation, but He can perfectly control Himself also. A passage which evinces this sublime truth is that of Romans 9:22-23, "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory." He does not mechanically lash out at sin but gives us "time to repent." This is not to imply that His justice is frustrated but that it has been deferred. Such a choice is determined by His infinite wisdom and can never be challenged by the natural reasoning of man. Repentance is our privilege not God's obligation.

Though God is exceedingly patient with us, we should never assume its application. It is a gross evil to think that we can enjoy our sinful "pleasures" now and then repent when we want to, all the while expecting the Lord's endurance. As stated earlier, He is not required to be patient with us; He gives no inclusive promises concerning the forbearance of our sin. We cry for justice against sinners, forgetting how great a one we are too. It is pure arrogance to expect God to be long-suffering while we indulge in our selfish, fleshly desires. To the rich fool in Luke 12, He says, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you," and to the Christian, He commands, "be zealous, therefore, and repent." Both the warning and promise in scripture is, "'At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you'; behold, now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation.'" We must pursue holiness now.

A great irony of this theme is that it is "easier" for God to be patient with us than for us to be "patient" with Him. We are such a greedy, discontent people. We tend to despise inconveniences, regardless of their spiritual value and arrogantly think that we know what is the best. He knows what we want, and He knows what we need, but He gives us what is the most excellent. The trusting heart believes this and does not despair because it knows that it will see the goodness of the Lord. The pattern is all too familiar: He gives, we are temporarily satisfied, we want more, He withholds, we

grumble. We then dictate our order and demand immediate fulfillment. And should our request not be swiftly discharged, we doubt God's love and concern and too often turn to other means of fulfillment. The patience of the Lord is duly manifested in how He endures an ungrateful people such as us.

When the Lord executes His anger, it is not because He has spent His patience, but because the proper time has come for Him to expend His wrath and judgment for the purpose of His ultimate glorification. The determination of this time lies not in the judgment and wisdom of men. Whether He acts swiftly as He did with Dathan and Abiram hurling them alive into the pit or suffers long as with Israel or ourselves, we must accept all. God is kind in all His deeds. That He suffers long as a result of our sin truly is a stupendous demonstration of His divine excellencies. But even if He should act otherwise, our response must also be one of awe and love because He is a great God. We can never be in a position where we can question the Lord's actions. It is pure arrogance to demand that He suffer longer with anyone whose heart is unrepentant.

How great a demonstration of patience is shown in the parable of the wicked tenant farmers. God sent a prophet to the nation of Israel, but they beat him. He sent others, but they were also beaten or stoned or killed. Finally, He sent His Son saying, "They will respect My Son," but they crucified the Lord of Glory as an outcast. They rejected their Creator. He provided opportunity after opportunity, but they tenaciously clung to their greedy and selfish desires. Still, He longed to gather them the way a hen gathers her chicks.

Again, we see in the prodigal son the Lord's magnificent love. He squandered his estate on worldly pleasures before he repented and returned to an eagerly waiting father whose response was a compassionate embrace. "But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found." The joy in heaven is incalculable when one sinner repents. God eagerly longs for the salvation of a soul so that He might lavish upon him all of the riches of His divine grace.

Israel, as they confessed their sin, praised God again and again for His great patience and compassion. They realized that it was this that stayed their just execution. In Nehemiah 9:17, we read, "But Thou art a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness; and Thou didst not forsake them." And again in verse 31, "Nevertheless, in Thy great compassion Thou didst not make an end of them or forsake them, for Thou art a gracious and compassionate God." They proclaimed their Creator as "the great, the mighty and the awesome God." He is the same today.

We take for granted this mighty theme of the divine patience. We too often "think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience." The Lord is compelled by no obligation to endure our rebellion. For what reason should the great and awesome God suffer long for an evil people? He does so because He desires, beyond our deepest appreciation, an intimate fellowship with us. We would do well to heed Scripture and "consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself." He endured the cross for the joy set before Him. It is a praiseworthy thing that the Lord's patience is much greater than our own. It is also very much an essential and necessary thing. Even as the enlightened people of God, we are still so ungrateful. But even what we cannot fully comprehend, we can still love and adore. "Thou, O Lord, art a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth."

What does God's patience mean to us?

We can be patient when sinned against

No one will ever live life without being sinned against many times. This may be something horrible like physical or emotional abuse, betrayal, or cruelty. Or it may be more subtle like deceit, gossip, or being deliberately ignored. But in all cases it hurts. When we are sinned against our first response is usually to strike back to inflict more pain than we received. But perhaps we should first pause and ask God for grace and wisdom: grace to not return sin for sin and wisdom to know what the most righteous response should be. But to do any of this we need patience. We need to

understand as deeply in our hearts as possible how God is patient towards us and does not immediately lash out at us when we sin against us.

We can be patient when people behave or think stupidly

It is easy for us to become frustrated and impatient with people who are being, in our humble opinion, stupid. We feel that we understand the situation so why can't they? It is obvious to us that something is wrong and/or harmful so why do they insist on continuing to do it?

Yet we all are very stupid. Is not sin perhaps the greatest display of stupidity? Are we not failing to see the great blessings that we are sacrificing in order to obtain a cheap, temporal pleasure? And this is in defiance of God's written word, our conscience, other people's counsel, reason, and consequences (our own or others), yet we insist on sinning. However, God continues to be patient with us.

Perhaps God has placed us in that frustrating situation so that we, who apparently know better, can teach those who do not. Are not trying circumstances the greatest teacher of patience? When we are in a situation which is frustrating perhaps we should not see it as a waste of our time but as an opportunity to further develop our character so that we might become more godly.

We can be patient with other people's weaknesses

All of us have talents or skills and, in addition, when we are saved the Holy Spirit gives each one of us spiritual gifts. These are areas where we excel beyond the average person's abilities which, by definition, means that we will be prone to feel superior to others here. Perhaps that is why God included 1 Corinthians 4:7, "For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

If we are running fast and easy and someone falls down should we not go back and pick them up and help them move forward? We all have weaknesses where we hope and expect others to be patient with us yet if we are not patient with them then how can we expect it in return?

Pride pounds its chest and says, "See what I can do" and runs ahead. Humility looks to God and says, "Let me help you."

Answers to quiz

- 1) b
- 2) a
- 3) b
- 4) c
- 5) b
- 6) a
- 7) b
- 8) a
- 9) a
- 10) b

Discussion

Situation

Rose and Andy have been married for ten years and generally things are pretty good with them. However, they quickly and easily bicker even in front of people who are strangers or guests that they are having over for dinner. It is common for them to criticize every little thing that the other one does and this will go back and forth for several long minutes. This bickering never degenerates into anything harsh and there is never any name-calling, but it is still uncomfortable and is a bad witness to their non-Christian family members. How can you use the theme of patience to help them to defeat this sin?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's patience means to us?
- 2) How has God been patient with you?
- 3) What are some examples of people or situations in the Bible where the patience of God is clearly seen?
- 4) How can we learn to be more patient?
- 5) What are the greatest obstacles in our thinking or character to learning to be patient?
- 6) How do difficult circumstances teach us to be patient?
- 7) When we find ourselves becoming easily frustrated and impatient with someone what should we do?
- 8) Should we a) always, b) sometimes, c) never be patient when someone sins against us? Why?
- 9) If God is so patient with everyone then why when two people commit the same sin might one immediately suffer harsh consequences from that sin whereas the other person seems to get away with it?
- 10) As perfect as God's patience is, there are times when even it will cease. In general, under what circumstances could we say that it is time to stop being patient and time to take a different course of action?

THE DIVINE FORGIVENESS

How well do you know God's forgiveness?

- 1) We can make ourselves acceptable to God
 - a) only through salvation and the forgiveness of our sins
 - b) by going to church and tithing
 - c) by being a good person
- 2) Jesus Christ was able to fulfill all of the divine demands of sin because
 - a) He is God and is perfect and infinite in holiness and character
 - b) We participated with Him on the cross in taking up some of His sufferings
 - c) He was first beaten and mocked
- 3) When we confess our sin we should
 - a) still feel bad to prove to God and to others that we have truly repented
 - b) still do some kind of penance
 - c) believe that we have been cleansed, learn from it, and go on
- 1) Someone who is saved and is therefore in Christ Jesus
 - a) is still under constant condemnation and will be until Heaven
 - b) can be condemned by God but only for really bad sins
 - c) can never be condemned by God again
- 2) The difference between punishment and discipline is
 - a) nothing; they are synonymous
 - b) punishment is judgment against sin and is only for the unsaved whereas discipline is God correcting the saved so that they might not sin again
 - c) punishment is harsh judgement from God for really terrible sins whereas discipline is a more mild judgement and both can be applied to the saved and unsaved
- 3) When we understand just how sinful we are we should
 - a) hang our heads in shame
 - b) go someplace alone for a week and pray and fast to cleanse our souls
 - c) rejoice that Jesus Christ has set us free
- 4) For the person who is not saved
 - a) God can pretend that certain of his sins did not occur
 - b) God can forgive some of their sins but not all of them
 - c) God cannot forgive even one of their sins
- 5) We deserve to be forgiven of all of our sins when we get saved because
 - a) Jesus paid the full price
 - b) We are generally good people who earn it
 - c) God knows a worthy recipient when He sees one
- 6) An aspect of forgiveness is
 - a) not holding the offending person responsible for that sin ever again
 - b) taking it back if the person commits that same sin again
 - c) telling other people about that other person's sin so that they will be aware of it
- 7) A hindrance to forgiving another person's sin against us is
 - a) praying for the power to forgive since that only confesses a lack of faith
 - b) making the sin out to be more than what it truly was
 - c) studying forgiveness in the Bible because it must come from the heart and not from the head

Contemplation

The conquest of sin by Jesus Christ is the triumphant glory of the Bible, the greatest manifestation of God's love, and the central focus of His majestic dealings and relationship to man.

To pervert this necessitates a humanistic, self-governing philosophy. The religion of man centers and depends on “works,” a ceaseless striving for an indeterminable standard in order to make oneself acceptable to God. To the degree that this is incorporated into any system or thought is to the degree that it blasphemes the Most Holy. Man’s intrinsic ability to be acceptable to God is as impotent as his ability to be as glorious and holy as the Lord of Hosts.

To understand God rightly, a person must understand the cross and resurrection rightly. These issues of who Christ is and what He accomplished mark the most common perversions of the sacred scripture. The patience, the mercy, the justice of God, indeed, all of His discernable attributes are exemplified clearly and explicitly in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By this alone, wretched man can meet the Most Holy God and stand unashamed and blameless in great joy. To discredit the cross is to outrage and blaspheme all that constitutes the pure nature of God.

The estimation of our sinfulness cannot be computed from our viewpoint, but must be calculated from God’s perspective. We see ourselves as sinful; God sees us as wholly depraved and evil. We think of ourselves as sincere; God sees the inclination of our hearts to be evil from our youth. Evil cannot be weighed against evil; it must find its appraisal only in being contrasted to absolute holiness. Natural reason tells us that good must simply outweigh bad; revelation informs us that God demands perfection. Christ did not die for righteous men He dies for sinners – He died for us all. In our unregenerate condition, we viewed ourselves as better than we really were, but as children of God, we tend to degrade our position and appearance before Him. Our sinful nature refuses to agree with God.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He could not have given any more of any less—He gave Himself. All that He was, He gave, yet without injury to His immanent holiness and deity. Because of God’s unapproachable holiness, sin demanded a high price. That price could be nothing less than the immeasurable holiness and dignity of the Christ. The mighty scriptures herald this truth, “you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.” And again, “For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” It must, too, be further understood that no greater cost could have been demanded for our sin, no greater sacrifice could have been made. Nothing was withheld; nothing could have been added. Again, the heinousness of sin can only be properly determined when it is accounted that the absolute holiness of a righteous God was violated. This makes sin of infinite evil and significance. Divine justice had no minimum requirements—it demanded all. The propitiation of a righteous God was the most awesome accomplishment eternity shall ever witness. Redemption could have come by no other means. All was required—all was given. The result—God and believe man have peace.

The resurrection of Christ proved with total absoluteness that His payment for sins was sufficient to propitiate the ineffable justice and holiness of God. Should justice not have been satisfied, should sin not have met its full judgment, Christ could not have risen. But the historical and Scriptural truth is that He did rise from the grave, triumphant and glorious. His death was totally efficacious. All that justice required Christ fulfilled. What remains is for us to believe it. For us to think that we need to add any to the payment of our sins is a heresy and a sin. The Lord Himself said, “sacrifice and offering Thou has not desired, but a body Thou hast prepared for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast taken no pleasure.” This is because “He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.” Jesus Christ paid for our sins; He rose from the dead and is seated at the right hand of God. We must be satisfied with the once for all death that satisfied God.

How too frequently after we sin do we feel that we must do something in order to propitiate God. We think that we have to add to the work of Christ to be made acceptable to the Father, as though Christ’s efforts, in some undisclosed way, fell short. We must humble ourselves before God and admit that we do not need to justify ourselves before Him. We have already been eternally justified; God is completely propitiated. His forgiveness is conditioned only on Christ and not on our performance. If He accepts wholly the Lamb of God, He must necessarily also accept to the same level and standing, those who have been imputed the full righteousness of Christ through believing.

To estimate the Lord's acceptance of us, we must look only at Christ and not at all at ourselves. We do not have to appease Him because we are forever wholly accepted in the Beloved. "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin," not in animal sacrifices, not in penitence.

How powerful Colossians 2:13 is, "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions." And again Hebrews 10:14, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." There are no longer any divine consequences required for the sin of the person who is in Christ. That we have been forgiven all our transgressions must include those both past and future. And what we have been forgiven of can never be held against us or else this doctrine is a little value and God is a liar. But payment is once and forever. Christ died for our sins. That which is perfect before God must necessarily be without stain. The spiritual reality is that we are wholly and eternally forgiven of our sins. The sweetness of this truth should overwhelm our hearts into a never before achieved love for God.

The fact of our divine forgiveness is a basis for growth and for our daily, experiential conforming to Christ. In 2 Peter, chapter one, God lists several qualities that will render us neither useless nor unfruitful in the full personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. He then explains that the reason we would lack these qualities is because we are blind and forgetful. What have we been inattentive to and neglected? What is it that we have become dull and shortsighted to? We have forgotten our purification from our former sins. We have forgotten that we are forgiven. The one who meditates much upon this tremendous truth of forgiveness shall experience a life of such intimacy with the Lord as never thought possible. In this, too, lies the key to never stumbling. And if we do stumble, then we know what it is we have forgotten. Regardless of the magnitude of our transgression and of its frequency, we can forever be overwhelmingly confident that God has forgiven us.

In Nahum 1:3, God declares that He will "by no means leave the guilty unpunished." In this, the absolute is established that sin produces guilt which, in turn, demands punishment. This punishment cannot be overlooked nor voided by any divine leniency or compassion. It is a fearful certainty. No man can escape from it; no man can placate it. However, for the believer in Christ, there are abounding promises concerning this punishment. Two of which are: John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My work, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." And perhaps one of the most glorious proclamations in the Bible, Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Hence, the one who believes in Christ is delivered from the divine wrath. His sins, however, do not escape punishment, but instead have fallen completely on the sacrificial Lamb. Thus, on the basis of the revealed will of God, it is impossible for a Christian to stand guilty before the Judge. "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justified; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." Jesus Christ, the righteous, is our Advocate with the Father, our faithful high priest who always lives to make intercession for us.

One of the most basic truths which should be firmly implanted in the heart of every believer is that of our total and absolute forgiveness and judicial guiltlessness before the Most High. This relationship of peace is emphasized much in the Holy Scriptures; however, many Christians still have a problem with guilt. This reveals at least two things; a misunderstanding of the forgiveness of God through Christ and a miscalculation of our own sinfulness, even though now a child of the King.

Though it should not be dwelt on, a person should make an attempt to comprehend their rebellion and gross sinfulness before the Lord. The apostle Paul demonstrated this in Romans 7:7-25. The necessity of this perhaps lies in the fact that we are creatures of comparison. We understand good because of the presence of evil. We recognize God's love because we have felt Satan's hatred. We feel alive because we once were dead. God uses this fact many times in defining Himself. He compares Himself to a shepherd, to a fountain, to bread. In the beginning, man was able to fully understand God directly, but a consequence of the Fall was the subjection of understanding to mundane comparisons. But great hope lies in knowing that when we are lifted into eternal glory, we

shall see God as He is. A more proper apprehension of our sinfulness results in a greater appreciation of our forgiveness, thereby producing a true freedom from guilt. Though we are judicially holy and blameless before the Lord, nevertheless we sin. And though, as we fear the Lord, we will experientially become more holy, our transgressions will still be many. This cannot be ignored but it can be confessed and forgotten. We can forget the sin yet remain aware that we are sinners. The solution is a continual burden of guilt is not to try to ignore it, but to realize the forgiveness of it. Indeed, if we truly grasped our great sinfulness, we would be more gripped with the necessity to dwell not on our sin and feel guilty, but rather, to fall unhesitatingly upon the forgiveness of God.

In Luke 7:47, Christ makes the powerful declaration, "he who is forgiven little, does little" and likewise, he who is forgiven much, loves much. It is not that the adulteress was so much greater a sinner than the Pharisee, he being so "righteous," but that she assessed her sinfulness, and therefore, her forgiveness much more realistically. Any sin is of immeasurable offense to God, be it murder, adultery, blasphemy or simply an evil thought or an unloving heart. Any transgression is worthy of eternal damnation and though they may vary in intensity and will therefore be judged accordingly, nevertheless they are of immense insult to the Lord. No man is more deserving nor more needy of the Lord's forgiveness than another. We are all great sinners, and we have all been forgiven much. The great issue lies not in how evil we were before our salvation, but in how much we will believe in our forgiveness afterwards. The heart that grows in appreciation of this grows in love.

The proper consequence of realizing more clearly our wretchedness before God should not be a proneness to hang our heads lower and beat our breasts and cry over our miserable state, but rather, to declare triumphantly and to rest securely in the cleansing and forgiveness of God. We are able to say as Paul did in Romans 7:24-25; 8:1, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We are victors as the world can never know, exalted to a state which it can never attain. We are not forced to live a life given to creatively forget our misery, but to rejoice wholeheartedly in the glory and triumph which is ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord. This declaration of Paul's is the anthem of all born-again believers. It is our confidence before the Lord God Most High. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.

We will always be aware of sin in our life. We will never, in our mortal state, be in a position where we can boast of our sinlessness. This is because God is faithful to continually reveal those deeper sins which have been present and manifest in various ways through most of life, but which we have been consciously unaware of. He does this primarily that we might become holier and more obedient. We are, by nature, an evil people with evil habits. We have no inherent inclination toward righteousness. Our sins are both profound and numerous. However, God does not just expose everything at once, but only as much as we can bear. His desire is for us to overcome rather than to be overcome. We are a self-centered people, though, who are all too prone to self-pit. The tendency for us is to become discouraged and feel ineffective and useless. Yet we can always have the confidence that regardless of how much sin God in His loving-kindness reveals to us, it is all the much more so forgiven. There can exist no sin in the believer's life which the Lord has not already forgiven. Rather than concentrate our attention on our own failings, this should draw our heart to the Lord's victory. The more loathsome and vile our sin may appear the more glorious and triumphant the forgiveness of God should become.

In Ephesians 4:32, we read the magnificent words, "just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." In these nine words, several vital certainties are established. The one to be principally discussed here is that forgiveness is one of God's attributes which can only be truthfully experienced by a believer. God shows mercy, patience, and love to the unbeliever but He can never forgive their transgressions. Because forgiveness can only come through the cross, an unregenerate man can never be forgiven except unto salvation and then only to infinite completeness. God either forgives all sin for all time or He does not forgive at all. No man shall ever enter hell without the full burden of his sin to be paid. Guilt and punishment are necessary qualities of an unbeliever's life; forgiveness and

discipline are those of a believer's. God in Christ has forgiven those who, at one time and for all time, humbly came to Him, dependent and trusting unto salvation. It is a permanent absolute.

The reason why God cannot forgive apart from Christ is because forgiveness is not His pretending that we had never sinned, but that all of our sin has been properly dealt with. God can and does show mercy to all, but He cannot forgive outside of Christ. It is only for those to whom the cross has been personally applied. Forgiveness is not leniency nor is it some great magnanimity on the part of God. It comes at an infinite price. Payment is always demanded for iniquity, and divine wrath must always be vented upon the offense. All of this Christ has borne. Forgiveness is not at the expense of justice, but is the satisfaction of it.

This leads us to the stupendous truth that we are forgiven as sinning Christians because we deserve to be, not in ourselves, but in what the Savior is and has done and because we are now and forever "in Him." So in blissful reality, we now deserve not punishment or wrath for our sins, but forgiveness. To receive anything else is to qualify God as unjust. The redemption of man involved no small undertaking; its fruit is, therefore, no less majestic. We are its fruit. We are that for which Jesus Christ gave His life.

Perhaps one of the starkest examples of what forgiveness of sins means to us is the immeasurable difference of our destiny. As gross and inhumane sinners, we deserved nothing less than to be immediately hurled into hell to pay eternally for our iniquity. Consequently, our present condition should be one of hopeless torment. The mercy and patience of the Most High stays this because the one who believes on Christ will never have to fear. This is an amazing truth. Our destiny, instead, is one of enjoying the presence of God forever. "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." We have been bought out of the slavery of sin and are now the precious possession of the King Himself. Filthy rags have been replaced with robes of righteousness. Children of wrath have become children of God. How dull our hearts can become to this transformation. We take it for granted as though eternal life is what we deserved. Because all the requirements of justice that a holy and righteous God can demand have been met by Jesus Christ, a Christian can never stand before the Lord guilty or condemned. An unbeliever can never be excused of their sin; a believer can never be judicially guilty of theirs. Creatures deserving of infernal darkness are, instead, granted the honor of being forever with their God.

A theme closely related to divine forgiveness is that of justification. These are but two of the many transformations that occur in a person's life upon believing on Christ. They are easily confused as being synonymous but are in reality very much different. Both are a work of God, accomplished immediately and unchangeably upon salvation. Both are conditions of such superlative spiritual glory that the unspiritual mind must necessarily fall vastly short in its cognizance of such magnificent themes.

The two words "righteousness" and "justify" originate from the same Greek New Testament word. Justification is the judicial proclamation of God whereby the believer in Jesus Christ is reckoned as immutably righteous as His Son. Righteous is what we have become; justification is the divine affirmation of such an act. We have been eternally declared as righteous as the One who walked the seas of Galilee and who is now seated at the right hand of God. It is a position unconditionally given to the believer, the possibility of which required the most costly and immense undertaking demanded of the eternal Godhead. It is the crowning glory of God's greatest work—the salvation and exaltation of sinful man.

The notable passages on this theme are 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Romans 4:25; "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him," and "He who was delivered up because of our transgression, and was raised because of our justifications." Whereas forgiveness is the remitting of sin, justification is the imputing of the divine righteousness. Forgiveness is the removal of all condemnation and complete exoneration from the penalty of evil. It entails the negative aspect which is of man. Justification involves the bestowing of the virtue and dignity of Christ. It is the imputation of the positive which is from God. Because we

sinned, Christ died; because we were justified, Christ rose. Those who are “in Christ” now stand before the Father in the full unashamed righteousness of His beloved and holy Son. Romans 3:23 lists two conditions of the unregenerate person, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Forgiveness remedies the first condition; justification exalts us to the second. What we have been given is greater than what we have had removed, to the degree that God’s righteousness is greater than our sin.

The incarnation of the Son of Man was ushered in with the words, “and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.” The night of His betrayal, the Lord Himself declared of the cup, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of man for forgiveness of sins.” And the great proclamation of believers is, “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him, forgiveness of sin is proclaimed to you.” This is the resounding theme of God’s work for man. “How blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven.” Those described as “none righteous” have become the righteous of God. The alienated have become His precious possession and those engaged in evil deeds have become partakers of the divine nature. What greater peace and security can we have than to know that we will never be condemned, never be judged? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?

That a holy and just God would die for the sins of His creation is a reality that commands profound veneration. Moses said, “show me Thy glory!” “Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.’” “And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.” Amen.

What does God’s forgiveness mean to us?

We can forgive others

Forgiving someone is perhaps one of the most difficult things that we can do. Some people would rather completely cut off a good relationship than to forgive. But the glorious truth of God’s forgiveness gives us great incentive and power to forgive others.

God’s forgiveness is an example. We offend God far more frequently and deeply than anyone could possibly do to us. Yet God is always willing to forgive the repentant heart. Adam’s disobedience, David’s adultery and murder, Sarah’s laughing at God’s promise, Peter’s betrayal were all forgiven by God. Studying God’s forgiveness is the ultimate model for how we are to think and behave when offended. God does not forgive you because you are good; God forgives you because He is great. In the same manner, you do not forgive someone because they have done everything that you demand, but because you are filled with the Holy Spirit.

He gives us the power to forgive. In Luke 17:5 the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” Their request was in the context of forgiving someone. Jesus just told them that no matter how many times someone offends you, you need to forgive each and every time. And they said, “But we can’t do this! It’s impossible! So give us more faith so that we can do this.” Jesus then continues with a story about a servant doing what his master expects him to do. Even if that person has hurt us badly, we only need a little faith to forgive. The problem is not that we do not have enough faith to forgive but that we do not have any faith to forgive. We get this faith through obedience. This story is about doing those basic things that God wants us to do. It is not even talking about doing great things. The servant in this story is not out there raising people from the dead or preaching the Gospel to thousands of people. He is doing that which is simple. He is plowing or tending sheep. He then comes in and serves a meal and clothes himself properly. God is saying that if you do not have the faith to obey God in even the basic commands then do not expect to have the faith to do something like forgiving another person. If you are not regularly attending a church or reading the Bible on a consistent basis or praying then how can you expect to be able to forgive? The choice to forgiving someone is not weighing the reasons for and against. It is in believing God to do the work in our hearts with His strength and His power. We will struggle with forgiveness so long as we leave God out of the picture and try and accomplish this on our own.

When we drink the deep richness of God's forgiveness we will want to share those blessings by forgiving others. In Matthew 18:21-35 there is the story of a slave who was forgiven of a great debt. But immediately after he went out he found someone who owed him money and rather than forgiving him of his much smaller debt he threw him in prison. That first slave did not understand the offer of forgiveness and so he was unable to grant it. Notice what is missing between verses 27 and 28. There was no humility or thankfulness. If God's forgiveness were on his heart then that would have flowed out of his life when he met the second man.

We can forgive ourselves

When we sin, we can willfully hurt ourselves in various ways. We can do penance by punishing ourselves for our sins. We can bear a grudge against ourselves, "I know that God forgave me, but I can't forgive myself." We can avoid church or Christians because we feel unworthy. And there are many other ways for us to add to the guilt of the initial sin. In all cases this is not humility but pride. If we have truly repented then God, who is infinitely more holy than we are, has forgiven us, but we refuse to forgive ourselves then we are saying that we have higher standards than God.

The purpose of guilt is to bring us to God so that He can forgive us. It is not to make us feel bad or to make us miserable. These are the means of guilt. The purpose of guilt is to bring us to a place where God can wash us clean from all of our sin. Guilt is like a street sign that points the way to God's forgiveness. But too often, instead of going to where that sign points, we pull it out of the ground and beat ourselves with it.

We may feel that we need to prove the sincerity of our remorse or repentance by suffering--by showing others that our sin does make us squirm. In this case we are more concerned about how others will perceive us than what God wants us to believe. Matthew 6:1 warns, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Is repentance a righteous act? Indeed. Do not turn your repentance into a drama. It is good to let others know that you have repented, but do not make a show of it. Do not put off repentance and forgiveness until you feel that you have convinced others that you are now worthy of it. The second that you sin, you have met every qualification necessary for God's cleansing.

When we refuse to forgive ourselves we often have self-pity or self-contempt. This provides a certain sense of security. If you think of yourself as a total failure then you can anticipate criticism. Seeing yourself as a complete failure is actually seductive. It enables you to continue to sin, "I'm just such a loser that I can't do anything right." Or, "There I go again; what is wrong with me?" It also enables you to avoid responsibility before others; "I'm hopeless." Or, "Don't give it to me because I mess everything up." This is not humility. This is not what God wants. This is actually self-centeredness and a not-so-sly way of avoiding responsibility before God, before yourself and before others. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 is a powerful promise, "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." Sin does not give us an excuse to be helpless. Sin gives us a reason to fall before God and to let Him lift us up and to let Him pour His power into us. God wants us to be empowered by Him so that He can use us in other people's lives.

We are free to do what is right

Sin is the greatest tragedy of mankind. It not only separates us from God but it enslaves us. Proverbs 5:22b declares, "He will be held with the cords of his sin." One of its greatest powers is to command much of our energy and time as we attempt to assuage its guilt. But when we are forgiven we realize that the guilt has been washed away and now we are free to focus on something else. Hopefully, understanding the cost of God's forgiveness will turn our hearts to love God and to motivate us to do what is right.

We avoid falling into sin ourselves

We might not want to forgive because we want to be angry, or because we want revenge or to see them suffer, or because we want to play the victim, or because we really do not like that person and want to keep it that way. Forgiveness defeats those temptations.

Forgiveness washes away bitterness. It frees us from enslavement to the memory of that offense.

We hate sinning even more

We might think that the more we understand that God forgives sin the more we might feel free to sin knowing that option is available. But the truth is that the more we understand forgiveness the less we desire to sin. We can only deeply comprehend the magnitude of forgiveness by grasping the heinousness of sin. When we see how truly ugly and destructive sin is then our response will be to flee from it.

Also, as we recognize the tremendous cost that each of our sins cost the Savior then we will be repulsed by the thought of adding greater suffering to Him just so that we might enjoy a worthless pleasure. Ephesians 4 lists many sins but perhaps our greatest motivation to avoid all of them is in verse 30, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

We are less judgmental

When you think well of yourself you will be tempted to think poorly of others. But when you realize how great of a sinner you are then how can you possibly be contemptuous of others? The person who is dripping wet when caught in a sudden rainstorm cannot scoff at those who have just had the same experience.

As we understand forgiveness we realize that as sinners we are closer to each other than we are to the infinitely greater holiness of God.

Answers to quiz

- 1) a
- 2) a
- 3) c
- 4) c
- 5) b
- 6) c
- 7) c
- 8) a
- 9) a
- 10) b

Discussion

Situation

Nancy received a harsh email from a good friend of hers accusing her of things that Nancy did not do. She called Nancy "fickle," "insensitive," and "selfish." Nancy left several unanswered messages trying to explain what the real situation was and how what her friend heard through rumor was not true at all. Then her friend sent another email further accusing Nancy of other wrongs and never once addressed Nancy's explanation. This went on for another two cycles before Nancy realized that her friend is set on believing what she heard and that nothing Nancy can say will make any difference. Nancy came to you distraught over what happened and admits that she is having really negative thoughts about her friend but since her friend will not listen to her or talk to her there are no real lines of communication. What will you tell Nancy that she should do and how she should think?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's forgiveness means to us?
- 2) What is your own definition of forgiveness?
- 3) Why is it important to understand God's forgiveness?
- 4) God says in Hebrews 10:17, "And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." What does "I will remember no more" mean?
- 5) Why did Jesus Christ have to die so that we might be forgiven?
- 6) Read 1 John 1:9
 - a) What does it mean to "confess our sins"?
 - b) Why is God's faithfulness so important?
 - c) What does it mean to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?
 - d) Do we have to diligently root out every sin that we commit no matter how small and confess it?
- 6) What is the difference between failure to confess a sin and refusal to confess a sin? How does God treat you in each situation?
- 7) What are some ways that we can try and do penance for our sins?
- 8) Why is the fact that God is so compassionate important for us when we sin?
- 9) Why do we still feel guilty even after we have confessed our sin?
- 10) When it comes to forgiveness, God says that His ways and thoughts are above our ways and thoughts. Why is this important to understand?
- 11) Why is it dangerous to think that we can help out God with our forgiveness?
- 12) What are some ways in which God forgave people in the Bible?

THE DIVINE COMFORT

How well do you know God's comfort?

- 1) God's omniscience and comfort
 - a) have nothing to do with each other
 - b) interact in that because God knows everything He can heal the deepest pain
 - c) means that we must know everything about God before we can experience His comfort
- 2) To experience God's comfort we need to
 - a) draw near to God
 - b) feel sorry for ourselves so that God will feel sorry for us
 - c) seek all of the escapes that the world has to offer since if it helps then it must be from God
- 3) God's remedy for anxiety is
 - a) prayer and thanksgiving
 - b) trying to simply not think about it
 - c) convincing ourselves how strong we are
- 4) God views our weaknesses as
 - a) sins that need to be repented of
 - b) opportunities to show other people what not to do
 - c) opportunities to show His power and grace
- 5) One of affliction's greatest benefits is that it
 - a) should deepen our trust in God as we turn to Him
 - b) makes us stronger and more self-dependent
 - c) provides a target for other peoples' attention and resources
- 6) Oftentimes we do not experience God's comfort because
 - a) we are looking to other means of relief such as money, pity, food, or drugs
 - b) He really does not want to comfort us but is glad to see us suffer
 - c) We must first suffer to a certain degree before we deserve to be comforted
- 7) When it comes to miserable circumstances we are
 - a) pawns of fate trapped by our lot in life
 - b) victims of chance
 - c) watched over and cared for by God
- 8) Part of God's comfort is always
 - a) explaining the "why" of a bad situation
 - b) providing His promises and presence
 - c) making the bad situation go away
- 9) God comforts us
 - a) only directly with His presence
 - b) through His direct presence, through other people, with His promises in the Bible, and with circumstances
 - c) only with material or circumstantial things
- 10) When someone else is suffering we should
 - a) only pray for them and let God comfort them
 - b) pray for them and comfort them with the comfort that God has given to us
 - c) call their pastor so that he can handle the situation

Contemplation

We may not fully grasp the personal application of the divine omniscience nor even His omnipresence. We may not fully understand His necessary infinitude, but no heart or mind falls short in seeing the need for the abundant comfort which God so readily provides. No one is a stranger to

pain and affliction. The “God of all comfort” is a hope and a security no one can ill neglect. There is no greater relief of pain, no better solution for troubles than that available from God.

The omniscience of God necessitates that He know our lives both to the deepest and most minute detail of all that we shall ever experience. Because of this, He is able to understand fully what we are going through and how much we hurt. When difficulties come, sincere friends may apprehend the situation somewhat, but they could never understand deep down what really hurts. Consequently, they cannot take away the pain, and they cannot fill that void. But God does understand and He knows not only the pain but, moreover, He knows the perfect solution. There is never any pain too deep or too complex which God cannot heal. He can reach down and fill that void. His arm is not too short to save; it is certainly not too short to heal. The affliction of adversity, the pain of suffering, the despair of trials all summon what the human heart needs the most: the comfort and nearness of God. What fear produces, the perfect love of God can quench. We can always turn our weary and lonely eyes to the Lord and find a friend. We just need to allow ourselves to be filled up with the satisfaction of God.

Amazingly, when trials come, we quickly tend to seek refreshment from a dry and weary land when only the presence of the Lord can bring refreshment. The thirsty soul can find no greater satisfaction than in that of its God. The best the world can offer is escape; the best God does offer is Himself. The world scorns weakness; the Lord uses it. The world encourages us to dwell on our misery; the Lord tells us to meditate on His greatness. We love self pity; God desires self denial. Affliction and suffering make a demand of our attention. The human tendency is to concentrate it on ourselves; the scriptural command is to draw it to God. The issue lies not in finding God, but in seeking Him. The scriptures promise: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” Perhaps the biggest hindrance to knowing deeper the precious intimacy of the Lord is our own selfishness and self-pity. We will never focus on God until we take our eyes off ourselves. In this lies the key to experiencing the precious comfort of the Lord.

The human heart is readily troubled. Conflict can stir up our emotions and weary us. We can easily have an endless list of fears and anxieties. We are a people who tend to put far too much confidence in the uncertainty of the flesh and the world. The Lord is aware of our weaknesses and rather than despise us, He has made efficacious provision. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” He who has overcome the world has promised us strength and courage. Anxiety is simply a polite word for fear. It finds its source in the flesh. The Psalmist said, “I am full of anxiety because of my sin.” To fear men more than God will generate nervousness and apprehension in our lives. Therefore, the scriptures say, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.” A venerable “fear of God” and a realization of His concern and nearness should prove sufficient to calm my heart.

The spiritual perspective is in many ways tremendously different from that natural world’s. What the eye of man despises, the divine eye appraises as good. Thus, much despair results from not recognizing the divine comprehension. An example of this is what we term as weaknesses. Our frailty is not a cause of scorn from God, but because He knows our weakness, He has compassion. It is, indeed, our very impotence which draws forth the kindness and strength of God. How often we are tempted to think of our weaknesses as reason for the Lord to despise us, to shun us. We take the attitude that because we fail, we must stand alone and overcome or be overcome. We are driven by some prideful compulsion to prove ourselves to others, to ourselves and to God. Because we judge on the basis of outward appearance, we assume that God does also. Yet it was the lepers, the paralyzed, and the dead whom Christ touched. The scriptures say, “For power is perfected in weakness.” What we regard as a hindrance, God may see as a vehicle to manifest His great and magnificent glory.

Perhaps one of the greatest beneficial results of affliction is the building of a heart of trust for the One who created the heavens and the earth. Our nature is one that prefers to trust in only that which it sees. We will sooner put our confidence in the flesh than in the Almighty. We, for the most

part, favor secure and predictable situations. Difficulties, however, will tend to drive us into desperate actions. Worldly hopes can be quickly and easily exhausted. Thus, we must avail ourselves of that which remains—faith, a faith always sufficient to trust in God. Though it may not be large enough to move mountains, it is, nevertheless, always great enough to trust God and God does not disappoint. The subsequent divine fulfillment may not be what we expected, but his being the case, we can always be confident of the fact—then it is better. Only in the security of God is there valid hope. Believing this can only result in a freshness of spirit. To have the wholehearted support of Jehovah God should be a tremendous hope to anyone. What causes bitterness in the doubter builds trust in the believer.

There is a great need in everyone's life to know God intimately and personally. We were created not with an intrinsic self-sufficiency, but with a necessity of dependence on others, particularly God. But man, in his folly, will turn to anything he can to meet that need other than to his Creator. God created us in such a way that only through union with Him can we be made complete. Truly, there are very many needs in our lives that we can be filled apart from a relationship with God, but completeness consists not in having a great many possessions, but in having no obligations. Only those who are sick need a physician; only those who see their need seek God. Perhaps the best way He convinces us of this, as Psalm 107 so emphatically demonstrates, is through affliction. This thought is also expressed in Hosea 4:15, "In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me." Our greatest comfort is the presence of God. Our greatest motivation, oftentimes, is hurt.

The scriptures abound with promises to the afflicted. In Psalm 34:18, we read, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted." Psalm 40:17 says, "Since I am afflicted and needy, the Lord is mindful of me; Thou art my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God." Psalm 147:3, "He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds." Isaiah 57:15, "I dwell on a high and holy place and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the heart of the contrite." Jeremiah 17:14, "Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for Thou art my praise." What must grip our hearts is that these are not abstract principles but concrete promises confirmed by none less than the supreme God. Truly if God is for us, who can be against us? What man has lack who has God?

The greatest comfort God gives is a greater revelation and experience of Himself. Asaph vividly learned this through his afflictions and difficulties. In Psalm 73, we read, "When my heart was embittered, and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before Thee. Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand. With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing in earth. My flesh and my heart may fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For, behold, those who are far from Thee will perish; Thou hast destroyed all those who are unfaithful to Thee. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Thy works." Asaph experienced the comfort of God, not by receiving "things" from God, but by realizing His nearness. Too often, we look for the blessings of God to the exclusion of looking for God. Divine comfort comes not by what God gives, but in who God is. In affliction, God has promised us nothing but Himself. The only relief or hope we can expect of any adverse situation is the friendship of the Lord. Of course, He can and very often does relieve the adversity and affliction in many ways, but if we find the pain to be not yet consoled, then perhaps we have neglected the greatest comfort and relief God has given—that of His own nearness.

Reading through the first two chapters of the book of Job, one cannot help but be impressed with how deeply Job seemed to understand God's character. He was extremely afflicted losing practically everything, yet after both instances of testing, God boasts that "in all this Job did no sin." What man, after suffering much loss, can say, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."? The attitude he had was one of confidence in the Lord, of trusting His plans and desires. Job was secure in the greatness of God. He would have probably echoed David's conclusion in Psalm 145:17, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds." When originating in God, both good and adversity come from the same heart. Both are kind, both are filled with love, both are given to

make us happier. And though God does know the distinction in how they affect us, that distinction result more from our perceptions than from God. Good comes because we can humbly receive it; adversity comes to prepare us for the good, but both are saturated with the same kindness, the same care, the same love. Through the pain, through the hurt, there stands God ever near, ever ready to heal.

Though as righteous as Job was, at the time of his great affliction, his relationship with God was still primarily that of only knowledge. He feared God, served Him and obeyed His commandments, but his experience of the Almighty lacked the profound richness which the Lord so much desires. But as the result of much affliction, Job passed into a deeper intimacy with God through which his triumphant declaration was, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee." Affliction opens up the door for the spirit to behold the presence of God. It draws a person from knowing the acts of God to knowing His ways. It gives stubborn man an excuse to finally desire and acknowledge his need for God. It causes a person to see not the tragedy of the situation, but, as Stephen proclaimed, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Job 33:13 states, "Why do you complain against Him, that He does not give an account of all His doings?" We have no basis to object if God does not inform us of His intentions. He is under no obligation or promise to tell us of His ways. Understanding makes a situation easier but when there is no understand, then it becomes more necessary to place our confidence in the One who controls the situation. We must realize that circumstances do not randomly work together. We are not pawns of fate nor victims of chance. To believe that we are can leave us feeling overwhelmingly helpless. What security can we have believing this? But because God reigns and because He cares, this is not true. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." In this lies a great key to contentment. We will always be tossed by the storms until we climb upon the Rock. Godly character and attitudes will never be attained apart from God. Even if we do not understand a situation per se, knowing God will cause an understanding which goes much deeper and is more extensive in its application. The wicked want God to give them gain; the righteous see that their gain is God. If we do not understand the "why," then it becomes more necessary to understand the "Who." Understanding the mere "why" of a particular situation is limited in its extension of application to the next situation, but understanding God is unlimited in its application because it extends to all situations. "I, even I, am He who comforts you."

There is One who was the most abandoned, the most abused, the most hated. He suffered more than all and was crushed by His Father. He was tempted by Satan in all things yet knew no sin Himself. "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hid their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our grief He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed." This is the One who understands. It is He who has compassion; He who will not forget us. The Man of sorrows has become the God of all comfort.

To experience the comfort and compassion of God should not bring disdain to our hearts because of our weakness but should cause us to bow low before God because of His greatness. A realization of how much God desires to comfort us in our pain should cause us to worship Him and not to blame Him for the affliction, but to be in awe of Him for His commitment, His control, His concern. We will only blame God when we are not seeking Him and when we do not understand Him. Indeed, the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. The more we believe this, the more we will worship. "So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshipped." Even in the most difficult of times, He is worthy to receive all glory and honor and praise.

What does God's comfort mean to us?

We can comfort others

Second Corinthians 1:4 tells us that it is God, "who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." God can comfort us in many ways: through the Bible, with other people, with healing, with peace and hope, or by changing the situation. When we see someone else in pain we can take our experience of God's comfort and give it to them. We can share verses that meant a lot to us. We can be available to listen or just quietly be with them. We can pray with them. We can help them work out the situation. We knew pain and then we knew how wonderful God's comfort can be. Our response then should be to share God's with comfort with others.

Our pain is fully understood

Many times the greatest agony of a painful situation is thinking that no one understands or cares. And perhaps that is true except in one case: God always fully understands our hurt and our pain.

God knows our pain because He knows our every thought, intention, and emotion.

God knows our pain because He experienced much of it Himself while walking on the Earth. He was betrayed, abandoned, misunderstood, mocked, and doubted. He was called demon possessed, a liar, a fraud, and a lunatic. He was beaten, stabbed, whipped, and finally murdered.

God knows our pain because on the cross He suffered the full wrath of the Father for each and every sin ever committed by every one of us.

We can sit in quietude and tell God about why we hurt so badly and though we will not hear an audible voice in return we can still be assured that He hears, cares, and understands.

We have hope

There are two ways that God can relieve our pain. One is by removing or diminishing it here. The other is ultimate and complete relief in Heaven. We may not always experience the first but for someone who is born-again the second is an absolute guarantee.

Answers to quiz

- 1) b
- 2) a
- 3) a
- 4) c
- 5) a
- 6) a
- 7) c
- 8) b
- 9) b
- 10) b

Discussion

Situation

You oversee the "Mercy Ministry" which responsibilities include hospital visits, encouraging the discouraged and fainthearted, going to the homes of the incapacitated and helping out, and listening to those who need support. Todd is someone who views emotions as a weakness and whose response to everything is to either repent or to "just do something about it." Inexplicably, he just joined your ministry. You are concerned that he will be overbearing and overwhelm those who are tottering, but you do not want to discourage his desire to serve. So you take him aside to give him some

examples of situations where people might need comfort, encouragement, and support and what you would do for them and say to them. What might you say?

Questions

- 1) In addition to the ones discussed above, what are some other assurances that God's comfort means to us?
- 2) Why do we find it easy to blame God for difficult circumstances?
- 3) God does not physically hug us or whisper audible words of encourage in our ears. So what are some ways that we can actually experience the comfort of God?
- 4) What are some ways that we can comfort others?
- 5) Why is it that sometimes when we are in the lowest point of a trial that we do not seem to feel the comfort of God at all?
- 6) How do our own afflictions enable us to better comfort other people?
- 7) In the Bible, what are ways in which God comforted some people?
- 8) Why is God so perfectly able to comfort us?
- 9) If someone is in a tough situation that is entirely their own doing then when should we offer them comfort and when should we admonish them? Feel free to compose your own example of such a situation and how you would respond to it.
- 10) What are some ways of how we might willfully or unconsciously refuse God's comfort?

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Nehemiah 9:17, "They refused to listen, And did not remember Your wondrous deeds..."
Nehemiah 9:31, "Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them..."
Nehemiah 9:32, "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God..."
Romans 2:4, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance..."
Hebrews 12:3, "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself..."
Psalm 86:15, "But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious..."

The Divine Forgiveness

1 Peter 1:18-19, "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things..."
1 Corinthians 6:20, "For you have been bought with a price..."
Hebrews 10:5-6, "Therefore, when He comes into the world..."
Hebrews 10:12, "but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time..."
Hebrews 10:18, "Now where there is forgiveness of these things..."
Colossians 2:13, "When you were dead in your transgressions..."
Hebrews 10:14, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."
Nahum 1:3, "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power..."
John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word..."
Romans 8:1, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
Romans 8:33-34, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect..."
Luke 7:47, "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven..."
Romans 7:24-25, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death..."
Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other..."
Colossians 2:10, "and in Him you have been made complete..."
Colossians 1:13-14, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness..."
2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf..."
Romans 4:25, "He who was delivered over because of our transgressions..."
Ephesians 2:6, "and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places..."
Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"
Matthew 1:21, "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus..."
Matthew 26:27-28, "And when He had taken a cup and given thanks..."
Acts 13:38, "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness..."
Psalm 32:1, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered!"
Romans 3:10, "as it is written, 'THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;'"
Exodus 33:19, "And He said, 'I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you...'"
Exodus 34:6-7, "Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed..."
Exodus 34:8, "Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship."

The Divine Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."
James 4:8, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you..."
Philippians 4:6-7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication..."
Psalm 38:18, "For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin."
1 Peter 5:6-7, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God..."
2 Corinthians 12:9, "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you...'"
Hosea 4:15, "Though you, Israel, play the harlot..."
Psalm 34:18, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted..."
Psalm 40:17, "Since I am afflicted and needy, Let the Lord be mindful of me..."

Psalms 147:3, "He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds."

Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the high and exalted One..."

Jeremiah 17:14, "Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed..."

Psalms 73:21-28, "When my heart was embittered And I was pierced within..."

Job 2:10, "But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks...'"

Job 1:21, "He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb...'"

Psalms 145:17, "The LORD is righteous in all His ways And kind in all His deeds."

Job 42:5, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear..."

Acts 7:56, "and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up...'"

Job 33:13, "Why do you complain against Him..."

Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom..."

Isaiah 51:12, "I, even I, am He who comforts you..."

Isaiah 53:3-5, "He was despised and forsaken of men..."

Exodus 4:31, "So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned..."

Glossary of God's Attributes

Aseity (or **Self-existent**): God has always existed and did not originate from or have any creator. He is not limited by anything external to Himself. He is the limit of everything else so that nothing can transcend Him.

Comfort (or **Compassion**): God knows and understands everything that hurts us and is desiring and able to heal, soothe, console, and support us in that pain.

Eternal: God has always existed and always will. He is outside of time and exists simultaneously in all of time.

Faithful: God will never leave us nor forsake us. He is consistent in that He is always true to His character and will always be true to His promises.

Forgiving: Because Jesus Christ became our sin and paid its full penalty and then rose from the dead God is able to completely and forever remove the condemnation, guilt, and certificate of death associated with that sin from any person.

Freedom: God is completely independent of everything else.

Good: God is kind and benevolent. Everything that He does emanates from a loving heart.

Gracious: God gives us numerous blessings beyond measure not because we deserve it but because He is kind and loving.

Holy: God is completely without sin and has a deep hatred for sin.

Immanent: God is actively near to and interacts with all of His creation.

Immutable: God does not change in regard to His nature or His purpose.

Incomprehensible: Though we can know many things about God, we can never fully understand Him. There are aspects of His being and ways that are completely beyond our comprehension.

Infinite: God has no boundaries within time and space. He cannot be contained. All of God's attributes are also without boundary. Therefore, His love, mercy, grace, etc. are without limit.

Jealous: God does not want us to substitute anything for Himself.

Just: All sin carries with it a penalty that God must enforce. His mercy may postpone that penalty or eliminate its earthly consequences and His forgiveness may completely remove that penalty from an individual by transferring it to Jesus Christ's payment for sin, but ultimately all sin must be paid for.

Love: God desires to give a full abundance of blessings to each and every person. It is both a heart-felt desire and an action. It is sacrificial and constant.

Merciful: God withholds justice and negative consequences from those who deserve them. He overflows with compassion towards those who are needy and afflicted.

Omniperfection: God is completely without any flaw or imperfection. In every way He is as perfect as is possible.

Omnipotence: God is all-powerful. He can accomplish anything. Nothing is beyond His ability.

Omnipresence: All of God is simultaneously and personally everywhere at all times.

Omniscience: God knows everything. Since He exists simultaneously in all of time He knows everything in what we would call the past, present, and future. He knows the actual, the possible, and the impossible.

Patient: God suffers long with those who are sinful and rebellious.

Personal: God is a thinking, feeling being. He is alive and animate.

Righteous: God always does what is right and good.

Seeking: God reaches out to people so that we can know Him.

Self-sufficient: God is sufficient and complete within Himself. He does not need anyone or anything else.

Sovereign: God is the king over everything. He is control of all things although that does not mean that He necessarily causes all things. Nothing occurs that He does not at least allow.

Transcendent: God is separate from His creation. He is in everything and holds all things together but He and His creation are not the same.

Truth: God cannot lie. He never contradicts Himself.

Unique: There is only one God who is infinitely greater than all else.

Unity: All of God is consistent within Himself and He is indivisible.

Wisdom: God always knows the best means and best ends to every situation. He never makes mistakes.

Wrathful: God is offended by our sin and our idolatry and will not allow it to pass without judgment. This is tempered by His mercy, patience, and grace.