

Supernatural Nature of God

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God's earliest revelations of himself came through the names by which he was called upon by the ancient Hebrews. Not only has he made his name known he has also made his nature known. This was done in a unique and significant way by means of the names with which he identified himself. The Bible is filled with revelatory insights into the nature of God.

An identifying characteristic of God is called "an attribute," which is a characteristic or inherent quality of a being or thing. This is a very useful way of talking about God. This is even more important when we realize that, according to Gen 1:26-27, we are beings created in his image. We must know who God is, in order to know who we are, or who we are supposed to be. The attributes of God, as revealed in Scripture, may be, for discussion purposes, divided into two categories: (1) his supernatural attributes, and (2) his moral attributes.

By the designation "supernatural" we are simply talking about those qualities of God's being which are other than his moral qualities. In this lesson it is the supernatural attributes of God that are under consideration. These are the identifying characteristics God has revealed concerning his metaphysical or supernatural nature.

God Is Spirit

He is not a being who is a part of our natural realm of existence. Our world consists of space, time, matter, and energy. God existed prior to the creation of our world and is not one with this space-time dimension of existence. This attribute tells us that God is not one with

matter, i.e., he transcends all material limitations. He is not a physical being; he is spirit (Hebrew, *ruach* / Greek, *pneuma*). Jesus says of him in John 4:24, " God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship him in spirit and in truth."

God Is Eternal

Here we are talking about eternal in the absolute sense (i.e., without beginning or end, timeless existence). But from a more practical point of view, his eternity means that he is not limited to or associated with time as we know it. Time governs finite existence. God is infinite and with him there is no past, present, or future; all is "now" for him. In Gen 21:33 God is identified as *El Olam* - the eternal God.

In Psalms 90:2, we read: "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." In Psalms 102:25-27, we read, "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment." In Rev 1:8, God says of himself: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." He is, he always was, and he always will be. He is *El Olam* - God Everlasting or Eternal!

God Is Universal

God is an omnipresent being. This term does not mean "present everywhere," which is the idea most usually attached to the word omnipresence. This is not a biblical term and should not be used in a way that violates what is said in Scriptures about God. The idea at work here is that God is only present (i.e., manifests his presence) where he wills to be; he is a cognitive presence. "His eyes are in every place," (Prov 15:3), meaning that he sees (knows) all. Perhaps the word "universal" should be used rather than "omnipresence," because what is meant is that God is not limited to spatial existence. He created both time and space and is not limited by that which he

created. Neither is he within every object of his creation as was believed in ancient pantheism and the transcendentalism movement of the nineteenth century. This is the view that God is in everything and, thus, everything is indwelt with God. The concept of omnipresence taught in the Scriptures is that God's presence in our world is a cognitive presence through which one knows what is because he is there. This is the sense in which God is everywhere,

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you (Psalms 139:7-12).

Am I a God at hand, says Yahweh, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? says Yahweh. Do not I fill heaven and earth? says Yahweh (Jer 23:23-24).

In Acts 17:24, we are told: "The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands," (Cf., Acts 7:48; 17:27). This is not in contradiction with what is said in these other references; rather, it is a clarification of how God actually is present in our world, while at the same time transcending it. In every account of God entering into this dimension of existence, he does so by the sending of his spirit. It would be closer to fact to say that his awareness, knowing or cognizance fills the universe. This introduces us to the next attribute, which is very close in meaning to the attribute of omnipresence.

God Is All-Knowing

The theological term for this attribute is "omniscience." This attribute has to do more with "intelligence" than with knowledge, *per se*. Knowing and knowledge are the products of intellect. God's knowledge is supreme because his intellect is supreme. The "cause"

underlying the "effect" we know as our own intelligence is itself, intelligence. Even more significant is the fact that our existence and the existence of our world is filled life-sustaining design and order, which, in and of itself, implies creative intelligence.

The concept of God as an all-knowing being has led to a number of conclusion concerning what this attribute, in terms of his foreknowledge of man's future, implies about his responsibility for the events of the future. The *time* and *place* in which we find ourselves are necessary to knowing events that occur within that time and place. But this does not imply that one's knowledge of certain events causes those events to occur. There can be no question that God knows all that is, including what has, from our perspective, happened in the past and in the future. The future is an experience we have because we are locked into time. Knowing what will happen in the future would mean to us that we have some special ability to know something before it happens. Not so with God. He does not experience past or future, he is present eternally. He does not cause what will happen in the future any more that his knowledge of what happen in the past means that he is the cause of it.

There seems to be some confusion between the concept of foreknowledge and the concept of determinism. To know something does not make it happen. Experiential knowledge is for us, finite; i.e., we are limited in time and space concerning what we may experience. God, however, is infinite; i.e., he is not limited in time or space in cognizance. He is not limited to space or time; it is as simple as that.

Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit (Psa 147:5).

From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all humankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth - he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do (Psalms 33:13-15).

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in - behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain (Psa 139:1-6).

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb 4:13).

. . . your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Matt 6:8).

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered (Matt 10:29-30).

Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart (Act 1:24).

God Is All-Powerful

The Scriptures state that God's power is such that he was able to speak the universe into existence:

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm (Psa 33:6-9).

Here we are confronted with the concept that God *caused* all we know to exist by the very utterance of a command. In order to have produced such an effect as this universe, he would have to be the most powerful being conceivable. This is the claim of Scripture. He is *the cause* underlying our existence and the existence of our world.

In the opening lines of the Hebrew Scriptures we read: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). Throughout the creation narrative of Genesis one, we find the expression "God said," which is followed with the expression "and it was so." In Jeremiah 32 we read:

Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the fathers' sins into the laps of their children after them. O great and powerful God, whose name is the Lord Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve (Jer 32:17-19).

God's power ranges from the creation of a universe to the deliverance of a single soul inhabiting a planet within that universe. David's description of God as an all-powerful being is very representative of ancient Hebrew and early Christian concept of God. He speaks of a God who is great in power and possesses majesty and authority over all he has created.

David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the majesty; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all (1 Chron 29:10-12).

Such statements within Scripture have often let readers to wonder at such power and question his own sense of well-being in the face of the existence of such a being. In the revelation God has given man concerning his supernatural the power is accompanied by revelation of his moral nature. He is a Holy God, but is also a God of moral goodness. Unity of being is essential to the concept of a Supreme Being. If he is not perfect in his being (i.e., united and

complete in all aspects of his being), then he is not supreme, in that supremacy is the ultimate adjective of perfection. If God is more holy than good, more righteous than loving, more just than merciful and more wrathful than gracious, then he is less than supreme. If he is not complete in all aspects of his being and is not a Supreme Being, then he is no more than those beings worshipped and served as the supernatural beings of paganism.

Conclusion

Because God a Supreme Being he is an infinite being not limited by that which is finite; e.g., matter, time, space, energy. He is spirit (not limited by matter), he is eternal (not limited by time), he is universal (not limited by space), he is all-knowing (not limited in knowledge), and he is all-powerful (not limited in ability). This raises the question of impossibilities with God. Because he is perfect or complete in all aspect of his being, there must, of necessity, be things that are impossible for him to do. It would be impossible for him to do anything inconsistent with his identity as a Supreme Being. He can do nothing that would violate his divine nature (e.g. to lie, deceive, be unjust/unfair, or usurp the free moral agency of man (cf. Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18; James 1:13).

The concept of impossibility with God often raises the question of Jesus' statement in Luke 1:37, "For nothing is impossible with God." This statement must be understood in the context in which it was given, and should not be made to say more than it was intended to say. Here Jesus is instructing his disciples that their lack of faith causes the possibilities of life to be rendered dormant to them. Believing can cause things to happen. What we think is impossible may not be impossible at all, especially with God. Interpreters have the tendency to make everything said in Scripture a statement of absolute truth applicable to all persons in all times, at all places and in all situations. Such is not the case. All statements of Scripture must be taken in their context (textual and historical), a failure to do this often leads people to believe that God has instructed them to believe things that are not address to them or applicable to them in any way.

One's personal interpretation of the will of God is not always the will of God for them.

One rule of thumb is to ask oneself the following: "If a certain teaching we believe to be truly from God is inconsistent with who God is as a Supreme Being (i.e., perfect or complete in all aspects of his being), then can this teaching be from God?" If something we believe makes God appear inferior as a being rather than superior as a Supreme Being, then maybe what we believe to be from him is not from him at all. This is an extremely good rule of hermeneutics; in fact, it can be the decisive factor in a number of seemingly irreconcilable teachings associated with biblical interpretation. After all is said and done, God must be God and anything that challenges this truth, in any way, is not believable as having come from God.

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Questions For Discussion

1. If it is the case that there is every good reason to believe in God and no good reason to disbelieve he exists, why would it be necessary to know more about God than the fact this he exists? Why would it be important to God to reveal his identity as a Supreme Being to man?
2. Does the belief that man is created in the image of God have anything to do with his constant efforts throughout the ages to reveal himself to man? If this is the case, why would it be so?
3. Considering the supernatural attributes of God, in what way would you say that man created in the image of God?
4. In what way does God's identity as spirit apply to us as beings created in his image?
5. In what way does God's identity as an eternal and universal being apply to us as beings created in his image?

6. In what way does God's identity as a knowing being apply to us as beings created in his image?
7. In what way does God's identity as a being of power and authority apply to us as beings created in his image?
8. Can these supernatural attributes of God have an application to man in a non-supernatural sense; i.e. can they be thought of in a natural way and a part of who or what man is?
9. Why is it important to see God as perfect or complete in all aspects of his being, i.e., a Supreme Being?" If he were "superior" rather than "supreme" as a being, could he then be the being theism demands as the source of our existence? If so, why? If not, why not?
10. Discuss the conclusion of this lesson with a view to interpreting the will of God. Is it the case that all statements of Scripture are to be taken as absolute truth with applicability to all men, in all places, at all times? What is the difference between absolute truth and relative truth?