

BEHOLDING THE GOD OF MERCIFUL HOLINESS

TRANSCENDENCE, IMMANENCE, AND MINISTRY - ISAIAH 6:1-13

I. Introduction: Beginning w/the divine transcendence vs. our culture's rush to the divine immanence

E.g., Isa 57:15 – “For thus says the high and exalted One, who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the spirit of the contrite.’”

II. God's Transcendent Majesty (Isa 6:1-5)

A. Aspects of God's Majesty, Glory and Holiness (6:1-4)

B. Isaiah's Response (6:5)

III. God's Immanent Mercy (Isa 6:6-7)

A. The Initiator of Mercy – God

B. The Means of Mercy – Purification (personalized!)

C. The Goal of Mercy – Restoration and Service

IV. Isaiah's Call to Ministry (Isa 6:8-13)

A. Willing Service Flows out of such Knowledge of God (6:8)

B. Perseverance in Difficult Service Flows out of such Knowledge of God (6:9-13)

V. Conclusion

3. God cannot receive anything from us that is not previously, rightfully, and entirely his and his alone (Acts 17:25; Jas 1:17). In fact, this is so much the case that God is both dishonored and offended when we approach him as if he needs what we have to bring him, as if we can give him something that he lacks (Ps 50).
4. Every good and perfect gift, necessarily, is from him and him alone (Acts 17:25; Jas 1:17). Imagine this: there is no true thought, no good work, no discerning word, no talent, no ability, no gifting that is not from him. For every quality that exists in creation, and in your lives and mine, is there at all, and is there to the scope and extent that it is, only because God, in his grace and kindness, has granted this to us. While God possess all that he has – all that there is – intrinsically, in contrast, we have what we have – all that we have – by derivation. We owe him everything for all that we have and enjoy.
5. God alone is worthy of all honor, glory, praise, adoration, love, devotion, obedience and worship (Isa 42:8; 1 Cor 10:31).

B. Key Questions that arise because of God's Self-Sufficiency

1. Why are we here? What is our purpose?

The answer is NOT that God was lonely and needed fellowship. Ps 50 – he's offended and dishonored to think so.

Rather, particularly in relation to his people, the answer is this: though he doesn't need us, he loves us, and his purpose in creating and redeeming us is not that we might fill up some lack in him, but that he might fill us up with himself. He made us empty to be filled with his fullness, thirsty to drink of the water of life, weak to receive his strength, foolish to be instructed and corrected by his wisdom. In his love, he longs to give, to share the bounty. He wants us to experience in finite measure the fullness of joy and blessing that he knows infinitely—all to redound to the praise and glory of his name, the Giver and Provider of all the good we enjoy.

C. S. Lewis, in his *The Problem of Pain*, says that God's love is not like ours, helping another while needing also to be helped. No, God's love, says Lewis, is "bottomlessly selfless, by very definition; it has everything to give and nothing to receive" (p. 50).

2. Why does God demand our obedience?

Because he loves us and wants our best, and because he knows that our only true joy is found when we follow in his ways, he demands (yes, demands!) that we obey him. His commandments lead us to life. That is, His demands are given as from a Lover. C. S. Lewis, again, says concerning the commandments of God, "Those divine demands, which sound to our natural ears most like those of a despot and least like those of a lover, in fact marshal us where we should want to go if we knew what we wanted" (p. 52). As he says in his sermon, "The Weight of Glory," we are far too easily satisfied. God calls us to life, and this is found only in obedience to his will and ways.

3. Why does God enlist our service?

Psalms 100:2 and Acts 17:25 – how to put these together? He doesn't need our service, so his call for us to serve is a call to *participate in the privilege and joy of the ministry of grace* that flows from him, into us, and then through us into the lives of others. We can take no credit. All we have is a gift from him, and he gives us what we have to be used in service to others. God is so shareful! He is so generous! Rather than just doing the work unilaterally, he devises a plan by which he intends that some of his work be done in and through others, by calling and equipping and using them. We have absolutely no basis for boasting, either before God or others. Human pride is utterly shattered; it is devastated, when we understand in the depths of our souls the infinite and intrinsic fullness that is God's alone for all eternity. It not only is not about us; it is not of us, or from us, or because of us! All that we are—every quality that we possess; all that we have—every good and worthwhile characteristic; and all that we can do—every ability, both in its kind and in its degree – all are gifts to us from God. We simply cannot rightfully take credit for anything we ever are or ever do.

4. Why does God call us to pray?

Does God benefit from our prayers? Does he learn new things? Think of it, in Matt 6, in light of Jesus telling us not to worry since the Father already knows what we need, you might think that he'd teach regarding prayer, "don't bother." But God invented *prayer as a tool, a mechanism, for drawing us close to him, in sensed dependency, trust, hope, faith, love, longing, anticipation*. It is for *relationship*—for our relationship with him!

5. Why does he require our worship?

a. It is our *highest duty* to worship God alone, for *in him alone* is the fullness of infinite perfection. Hence, Isa 42:8; 1 Cor 10:31.

b. It is our *greatest delight* to worship God alone, for *from him alone* do we receive the fullness of everlasting joy and satisfaction. Hence, Isa 55:1-3; John 15:11.

c. It is our *ultimate destiny* to worship God alone, for *to him alone* are we drawn to know the intimacy of his glorious presence. Hence, Isa 11:9; John 17:24.

V. Conclusion

Marvel at the glory of God's self-sufficient fullness; be humbled by the glory of God's self-sufficient fullness; find your true joy and satisfaction in the glory of God's self-sufficient fullness; and love, obey and worship God to the glory of God's self-sufficient fullness.

BEHOLDING THE GOD OF GOODNESS & AFFLICTION

PLEASURE, PAIN, AND MINISTRY - THE BOOK OF JOB

I. Job's Story

Job 1-2; 38:1-7; 40:1-9; 42:1-17

II. Six Lessons on Affliction from Job's Story

1. Satan is the Immediate Cause of this affliction. Certainly this is clear in the story of Job – Satan is the one who brings the Sabeans, the fire, the wind, against Job's possessions and children, and then the boils on Job's body. But this is also the case in relation to Satan's control of much in the world – he is the “god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4), the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:3), and according to 2 Tim 2:26 all unsaved people are in “the snare of the devil” being “held captive by him to do his will.”
2. God is the Ultimate Cause of this affliction. Certainly this is clear here in Job's story. Consider the following lines of support from within the Book of Job itself:
 - 1) God brought up the subject of Job's godly life to Satan, anticipating (no doubt) Satan's objections and responses (note: clearly the 2nd time, God would know how Satan would respond).
 - 2) God established both *whether* Job would be afflicted by Satan and *the extent to which* Job would be afflicted (1:12; 2:6)
 - 3) God declares that he (God) acted against Job (2:3)
 - 4) Job's first response indicates God has “taken away” what he has lost (“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away . . .” 1:21)
 - 5) Job's second response indicates God has brought this adversity to his life (“Shall we accept good from God and not accept adversity?” 2:10)
 - 6) In God's responses to Job, God doesn't deny responsibility or defend himself to Job saying, “I had nothing to do with your suffering, so don't hold me responsible!” (38:1ff)
 - 7) The Book of Job's conclusion that the Lord brought the adversities upon Job (42:11)Other texts clearly indicate that both all good as well as all affliction and calamity that occur are ultimately from the wise and sovereign hand of God (see, e.g., Deut 32:39; Isa 45:7; Eph 1:11).
3. Because Satan, a morally evil creature, brought about this devastating affliction and does so from a motive only to do harm, *it truly is evil*. No matter what else we say about God's ultimate regulation of this evil, this does not cancel out or negate the reality of the evil *as evil*. Satan indeed intended it for evil (a la Gen. 50:20). Therefore, all evil is to God rightly despicable, morally wrong, and justly incurring of God's wrath.
4. Because God ultimately controls the affliction, *it is specifically permitted for good*, that is, God intended it for good (a la Gen. 50:20). Recall the line in William Cowper's hymn, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way”: “Behind a frowning Providence He hides a smiling face.” So, with Isa 45:7, remember also 1 Jn 1:5 (God IS light) and Psalm 5:4 (NO evil dwells in God).

5. When we cannot comprehend the good and wise purposes of God in affliction or evil, we *should not* respond in these ways:
 - 1) Curse. We should not curse God for evil that occurs in our lives or in the world. (Job 2:9).
 - 2) Blame. We should not blame God for wrong-doing. God always does what is right. (Job 40:8).
 - 3) Doubt. We should not doubt God’s perfect wisdom, or His mighty power, or His abiding love.
 - 4) Neglect. We should not neglect God due to confusion or frustration in the midst of our affliction.
 - 5) Absolve. We should not absolve God from ultimate responsibility for all that happens in the world, including all affliction, devastation, calamity, and evil. (Eph 1:11)

6. When we can’t comprehend the good and wise purposes of God in affliction or evil, we *should* respond in these ways:
 - 1) Praise. We should praise God in and for the affliction (Job 1:21; 1 Thess. 5:18, Eph. 5:20).
 - 2) Accept. We should accept the adversity God brings into our lives and into our world. We must be humble before Him in the face of such affliction (Job 2:10).
 - 3) Examine. We should examine our hearts to consider whether it might be the case that our own sin has brought this affliction as divine discipline. If so, we should repent. But if not, examine what lessons the Lord has for you through the affliction.
 - 4) Pray. We should pray earnestly, seeking God’s merciful deliverance from the affliction.
 - 5) Enlist. We should enlist the lasting afflictions of our lives for the good and wise purposes God has in and through, and not apart from, them.
 - 6) Relieve. We should work to relieve unjust suffering of others.
 - 7) Remember. We should remember that Christ endured the greatest affliction possible—all the sin and guilt and pain and suffering of the world, and even more, God’s full wrath against our sin—and look to Him who understands the depth of suffering far more than we could ever experience.
 - 8) Entrust. We should entrust to God the certain judgment and justice that He will bring about for immoral and evil actions. (1 Peter 2:23)
 - 9) Hope. We should hope and rejoice that because Christ has conquered all sin and evil, in our lives and in the whole created order, we await a day free from all tears, all sadness, all pain, and all suffering, a life filled with endless joy and glad satisfaction in all that God has for us in Christ.
 - 10) Glorify God. We should value the magnification of the glory of God above all else, including above the well-being, health, or happiness of His creatures.

Conclusion: “When you can’t trace his hand, trust his heart”—know God in the good days so you have strength of soul and conviction to withstand the challenges of difficult days. So, grow in knowing God’s character, and put your complete hope and trust in his wise and sovereign ways.