



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Basic Bible Doctrine, Isaiah 6:1-8

"The Attributes of God, Part III"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Again Father we turn to Thee with thanksgiving and praise for the privilege of the study of the word of God, especially Lord, we thank Thee for the opportunity to consider some of the things that have to do with the nature and being of our great God. We worship Thee for the attributes, which are manifest to us through the word of God and through the works, which Thou hast accomplished in the past.

We pray that Thou wilt give us understanding, and may, Lord, our sense of the greatness of our great God be expanded as a result of our time together, and may our lives be different as we reflect upon the person to whom we belong and whom we serve. Now, we commit this hour to Thee. We pray Thy blessing upon each one present, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We have been studying the attributes of God, and tonight we are concluding our brief study of these great points that have to do with the properties of the triune God. Has God ever learned anything? Is he ever surprised? Does he ever wonder? If he knows all, that is the past and the present and the future, is this compatible with human free agency? If God is all-powerful, can he make a square triangle? Can he make the past present? Can he make the sun shine and not shine at the same time? Can God

lie? Or can God die? If all men are created equal, why are there states and circumstances so different? There are some men who are wise and then there are others who are dotes, or dummkopf as the German would say. Dumb-dumb we would say. Some are morons. The conditions in which we find ourselves are not the same. Some are rich. Some are poor. The circumstances in which we find ourselves are different too. Some of us are born and live in free countries. Some live in countries in which the citizens are practically enslaved. Well, since they are not equal, men do not seem to be equal in these senses. Why are they not equal? If God wills all things, does he will sin?

Now, these questions provoke the study of the communicable attributes of God. We have been commenting upon the attributes. Gathering them around this simple classification into two parts. That is we have spoken of incommunicable attributes and communicable attributes. These incommunicable attributes are attributes, which have very little reference to human attributes. On the other hand the communicable attributes are those that have a great deal of reference to human attributes, and in our previous two studies we have considered the incommunicable attributes, those that are listed in this column.

Now, tonight we want to make a rather quick survey of these communicable attributes that are listed on the other side of our diagram. The incommunicable attributes stress the absolute being of God. Such attributes as self-existence, for example. Only God has self-existence. Only God possesses simplicity, unity, spirituality in the true sense. Only he is infinite. Only he is immense. Only he is omnipresent, and only he posses the attributes of eternity, and of course only he is immutable.

On the other hand, the other side of the diagram, is a listing of attributes which human beings to some extent, share in, so the incommunicable attributes stress the absolute being of God, the communicable stress his personal nature, by which he enters into relationship with others, knowledge, wisdom, particularly in his goodness, love,

grace, mercy, long suffering. These are things that are manifested in the nature of God in his dealings with us.

Now, we may classify these communicable attributes in a three-fold classification, and that's the kind of classification that we'll be trying to follow tonight. They may be classified into mental or intellectual attributes of God, or they may be classified as, or they may be divided into volitional attributes of God and moral attributes of God.

Now, all of these are communicable attributes. Some are mental in their emphasis. Some are volitional, and some are moral. Under the mental, we have the knowledge of God and the wisdom of God. Under the volitional we have the power of God and the will of God, and under the moral attributes the goodness of God, the holiness of God, and the justice of God.

Well, let's turn now to the knowledge of God, and consider it rather briefly. Professor Louis Berkhof has written a very good systematic theology. It really is the kind of theology that every Christian in Believer's Chapel ought to read at one time or another. There are some things in it that are not so good, but there are some many, many good things in it, and it's one of the finest brief summaries of the fullness of the Christian faith available. Professor Berkhof is an amillennialist, and one does not have to follow him in all of his eschatological teaching to profit from the book, and there are some other things in the book that you probably will not agree with, but he attempts to be biblical, and generally speaking, he is that. He defines the knowledge of God as that perfection of God, whereby he, in an entirely unique manner, knows himself, and all things possible and actual in one eternal and most simple act. Now, I would like to read that again, the essence of it. That is the knowledge of God is that perfection of God, whereby he knows himself and all things possible and actual in one eternal and most simple act.

Now, you can see one of the purposes of this definition is to avoid the idea that God has come to know anything. He does not have to come to know anything. He knows everything in one eternal and most simple act. And not only does he know

everything, but he knows everything possible and everything actual as well. When speaking of the present we call this the knowledge of God. If we speak of the past, we speak of God's remembrance of all things, and if we speak of the future, it is his foreknowledge or his prescience. That is his pre knowledge for knowledge, and if we speak of the universality of the objects of his knowledge, then we call that omniscience. Now, the Bible says the Lord is a God of knowledge, 1 Samuel chapter 2 in verse 3.

Now, we have only time to say a few things about this, and I will not apologize any more because it obviously is impossible to consider all of these great truths in one fifty minute period, so we'll just summarize. I want to say three things about this knowledge. First it is intuitive, not discursive. That is it's not obtained by reflection or deduction. The Lord did not create this universe and then look out upon it and then reason from the creation to the knowledge of that creation or anything else for that matter. In other words, his knowledge is an intuitive knowledge. It's the knowledge with which he possesses eternally as the divine being. He does not have to reason to a conclusion because he knows all of the conclusions. He does not have to deduce from one fact to another fact because he already knows what the deduction or the inferences one may properly make from another. It is also simultaneous, not successive. That is he does not receive this knowledge into his mind gradually. Some of it today, some of it tomorrow, some of it the next day, but it is simultaneous.

He has all of the knowledge in one, as Professor Berkhof says, "In one eternal and most simple act." So it's a simultaneous knowledge, not a successive kind of knowledge. It's almost as if a person were to enter the Library of Congress, and should immediately in one look know everything that is contained within every book in that library without bothering to read them. That is he would have them in one eternal act, even that's not a clear illustration of God's knowledge. It is independent knowledge, not dependent knowledge. He did not learn what he knows from books, and he did not have any tutor. He does not have to attend any classes in Believer's Chapel. He has all

of the knowledge already, and all we're doing is trying to dispense some of it here and there as we see it in the word of God. As far as the extent of the knowledge of God is concerned, we could say this. God's knowledge is the knowledge of all things possible and actual. That is he knows not only the things that are actually true, but he knows the things that are possible. He knows what would be true if another thing were true. We find this in the Old Testament in which God says that certain things will take place, if another thing takes place, so he knows all things actual and possible.

It is the knowledge of himself; in this of course he excels all of his creatures because while we know him, we do not know him with the knowledge that God knows himself. He is incomprehensible, so far as we are concerned, in that we never know him fully. Even after we've been in heaven for a thousand years, we will still be learning things about the Lord God, and when we've been there one million years, we probably will say we thought that we were getting near the knowledge of God at the end of the thousand years, but now we seem to know less about him than we did then because we will be continually learning, and learning also that the knowledge of God is an inexhaustible subject for us. That's why heaven is going to be so interesting. That's one of the reasons why it's going to be so interesting. He will be revealing more and more things about his infinite being and his infinite attributes as the days of eternity proceed. So it is the knowledge of himself. He excels all of his creatures in the knowledge of himself.

If he didn't have the knowledge of God, if he didn't have the full knowledge of himself, he would be under the greatest ignorance because he would be ignorant of the most excellent object in all of the existence, and so if God is knowledgeable he knows himself above all. He could not create. He could not govern if he did not know himself, so to sum up the knowledge of God is of all things past and future, possible and actual.

There's some problems with the thought of the knowledge of God. For example, can God foreknow free action? Some have, for freedom's sake, denied foreknowledge.

Other's have for fore knowledge's sake denied freedom, but Scripture teaches the divine foreknowledge of contingent events, and I'm not going to turn to the passage in 1 Samuel chapter 23, but if you are taking some notes, take a look at verses 10 through 13 of 1 Samuel 23, and you will see that the Bible does teach the divine foreknowledge of contingent events. Is predetermination consistent with free will is one of the other questions that arises in the study of the knowledge of God.

Now, if by free will, one means indeterminacy, that is the capacity to be swung either way, free will, then the answer is no. Predetermination is not consistent with free will. If one thinks a free agents act must be uncertain by definition, then predetermination is not consistent with free will. If free acts are uncertain they cannot be foreseen as certain under any conditions. If it is true that men have absolute free will and acts are truly uncertain until they take place, not even God can know that because if he knows that they are certain to take place, then they are certain under certain considerations.

One of the commentators has said, "Common sense tells us that no event can be foreknown unless by some means either physical or mental, it has been predetermined." So in answer to the question, is predetermination consistent with free will? No, not in the sense in which people ordinarily understand free will. Further complete freedom, people seem to think that's a great thing, but complete freedom arbitrariness or indeterminism in the philosopher's language is inconsistent with continuity of character.

One of the philosopher's of religion, Elton Trueblood, a very well known man, who was not a Calvinist by a long shot, may not have even been a Christian though I personally feel that there was strong evidence that he was one who trusted in the biblical revelation. Mr. Trueblood has put it this way, "A wholly unpredictable man would by no means be a good man. He would indeed be no more an ethical being than as a tossed coin. Man's will does not hang in the air swinging either way by the whim of the moment. It's a secondary thing, anchored in our deepest being, our very character in response to our inmost thinking." Our Lord referred to some individuals as "good

ground." And that of course was given by God. They are influenced by the Holy Spirit in infallible grace and respond to truth. Is this coercion? No, this is not coercion. It is an influence that carries the will along with it spontaneously. Finally, from the human side, the individual who receives such grace freely responds as a free agent. There's a difference between the free will of man, and the free agency of men.

Now, this explanation may not be satisfactory for every single individual. It may not explain everything. You cannot do that in just a minute or two anyway, but personally I'm convinced that the solutions to these questions of human responsibility and free will are, in the sovereignty of God, are related to the things that we've been talking about when we get to heaven we will have a full understanding, I hope, of some of these things, but anyone who knows anything about a courtship knows that a person may be chosen by another, influenced by that person, and yet freely and joyously respond to the alluring of the other person.

Now, in connection with the wisdom of God, let me say simply this, for these doctrines are very closely related. The wisdom of God is a particular aspect of knowledge it is practical. It is also intuitive, not theoretical and acquired. Now, knowledge and wisdom do not always accompany one another. There are people who have knowledge but who do not have wisdom. There are people who have wisdom, but who have not acquired a great deal of theoretical knowledge. The uneducated man may be superior to the scholar in wisdom. In fact, we make fun of many scholars who do not have any wisdom. They have a great deal of knowledge, but they have a very, very little bit of wisdom, and we've often used the expression about a certain person who is well educated that he is educated far beyond his intelligence. What we mean by that is that he's got a lot of knowledge, but the practical application of it has escaped him to a large degree. On the other hand, there are other people who have native intelligence. They have wisdom, but they do not have much knowledge that we would think of as derived from a school.

The wisdom of God is seen particularly in creation, the variety of creation, the beauty of creation, the order and fitness that has manifested in God's creation. The wisdom of God is seen in the providence of God. The way he rules and governs his universe, and accomplishes his purpose through it. I certainly think in the studies that we've been undergoing in the book of Genesis, in the last chapters of that great book, particularly. I'm thinking especially of the life of Joseph. We've seen the evidence of the wisdom of God in his providence, as he has dealt with Joseph in order to deal with the nation Israel. The greatest manifestation of the wisdom of God is in redemption, and there he solved the problem of the justice of God and the mercy of God and the salvation of sinners and the plan of salvation is a beautiful manifestation of the wisdom of God. It's remarkable that the wisdom of God is so great and so minute, that he even counteracts foreseen heresies in the word of God. Many of you know that there is a large religious organization that in the observance of the Lord's Supper forbids the laity from partaking of the wine.

Now, that is related to a particular doctrine of concomitancy, and it is the claim of this religious organization that if you partake of the bread, then you are partaking of the bread and the wine, and it's not necessary for you to partake of the wine. The wine is reserved for the priest.

Now, it's striking that in the accounts in the New Testament of the Lord's Supper, when we come to the wine, we read "Drink you all of it." But in the case of the bread, we do not read, "Eat you all of it." In other words, it's almost as if God has anticipated the heresy that would arise later on of the reservation of the wine for the priests, and has inserted the word "all" in connection with the wine. Leaving it out in connection with the bread, so that the wisdom of God is wisdom that deals even with such minute things as that. Let's turn now to the volitional attributes of God, and first the power of God. Berkhof again in this systematic theology defines the power of God as that perfection of his being by which he is the absolute and highest causality.



Now, one of the other theologians that I like very much because he is so lucid in his writing, William GT Shedd, says that the power of God is the divine essence energizing and producing outward effects. It is omnipotence in the case of the triune God, and he is limited in his power only by his perfections.

Now, there are some things that God cannot do. It is not because he has limited power, but he is limited by his own being. For example, he cannot do things that are self-contradictory. A logical impossibility is that in which the predicate is contradictory to the subject, such as these expressions, a material spirit. Well, you can see the adjective material is contradictory of the word spirit. You cannot say a material spirit. You cannot say a corporal deity because the idea of the deity involves the idea of spirit, where as corporal means in bodily form. You cannot say a sensitive stone because stones by definition are not sensitive. They are things. You cannot say an irrational man. Now, I know you know there are some men who are irrational, but ultimately no man is irrational because he has been given reason by God. The fact that he is a man means that he has reason. Now, he may not have much of it, and sometimes it may be hard to find, but he does have some reason, so that you cannot not really say an irrational man except in a modified form. You cannot say a square triangle in the very definition of triangle, square is a contradiction. You cannot say an honest politician because [Laughter] you cannot say a modest Texan. These things are self-contradictory.

God cannot do things that are self-contradictory. He cannot do things that are inconsistent with the nature and being of God. He cannot walk because if he were to walk then he would not be omnipresent. He cannot sleep because the fact that he is a spirit means that he cannot fall asleep. He cannot die because he possesses eternity. He cannot do things inconsistent with the perfections of God. He cannot do things unbecoming his holiness, his justice or his goodness, such as be tempted. The Bible speaks about the fact that he cannot be tempted. That would imply that he might desire something better than he possesses.

You cannot tempt God because he has everything that satisfies him. He has all of the perfections. There is nothing by which he might be tempted. He cannot sin. He cannot lie. He cannot deny himself. He can do all that he wills, but his will is determined by his nature, so that he is all powerful, but limited by his own inherent being. He cannot do things inconsistent with his decrees. He could not destroy the world after Adam fell in the Garden of Eden because he had already decreed certain things that would take place as a result of the fall of Adam. The idea that he could have stopped and started over again, is therefore just a human imaginary thought. That is not true to the nature of God. He cannot do things inconsistent with his decrees. He has determined these things.

Now, we don't have to argue, I hope, the power of God. You can see the manifestation of it in the miracles that he performed. The stopping of the mouths of lions, the making of the sun stand still, the curbing of the fire, and other things, his names also such as God Almighty expresses infinite power as well. His power is demonstrated again in the sphere of creation. The Bible speaks of creation as the work of God's fingers. It is manifested in the government of this universe. It is manifested in redemption in the fact that by the arm of the Lord he has saved his people. It is expressed by his power over natural causes, such as manifested in the lives of Jonah and Daniel, and even in his power over God himself, in the resurrection, and I cannot explain what I mean by that, but I will say that if you're interested again, remember the studies in the attributes have been given in about a sixteen message form if you are interested in further information concerning these things, you can see those tapes.

Now, the will of God. What does the will of God mean? There are profound and mysterious questions that arise in connection with the will of God. Are things right or wrong because God commands or forbids them, or does God command or forbid things because they are right or wrong for some other reason than his will? In other words, are things right because God wills them, or does he will certain things because those things

are right for some other reason than the will of God? The will of God is the second of his volitional attributes, and together with his power, these two make up what we mean when we speak about the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God is manifested in his power and in his will.

Now, the term the "will of God" has different meanings and consequently we must keep some of these separate or else we will misunderstand what the Bible says when it used the term the will of God. Occasionally, the term the will of God refers to the whole moral nature of God. We might say that the will of God, that is his whole moral nature that would include his love, his holiness, his justice, and so on. We'd say something is against the will of God. We don't mean some specific utterance of God's will, but it's just against his whole moral nature.

Sometimes it refers to the faculty of determination. That is that faculty by which you determine to do certain things. After this class is over I determine to go to Baskin Robbins. Well, there may be more truth in that a simple illustration, but that faculty by which we determine to go to Swenson's or Baskin's Robbins, is the will, and so the will of God is used of that faculty of determination. It is used of the products of his self-determination or his purposes. When we speak of God purposing something, we may say well that is his will, and so going to Swenson's may be looked at from the standpoint of the will of the individual who determined to do it because he likes ice cream, or you may speak of it as something that is done. That was his will to go there. That is you saw him a Swenson's, and it is also used of the power to realize the purpose of God that is the will in action. You will see the Bible speaking about the fact that he gave spiritual gifts to individuals according to his willing. Hebrews chapter 2 verse 4 puts it in the Greek text. According to his willing, that is it was the will in action that brought about spiritual gifts and it's sometimes used of the rule of life for man.

Now, we're concerned with the faculty of self-determination, when we speak of the will of God in this context. Well, God's will is his delight in himself. He is the

supreme good for himself and his creatures. We don't think that self-love is very good, do we?

Now, occasionally we do have people today talk about self-love. They use the term dignity, self esteem, and that's supposed to be very good, to have a lot of self esteem, and we speak, many preachers speak about the dignity of man. You very rarely ever hear me say anything about that because I think that is largely unscriptural. There is a sense in which men are in the image of God still, and if that's what meant by that, although the image is marred, well that would be alright, but if you mean than that, that man is a creature that possesses great self dignity, and should have great self esteem then I must confess, it seems to me the Bible does not speak along those lines, because as a result of the fall in the Garden of Eden, it's not good for men to have self love, generally speaking, but in God's case, self love is perfectly proper because of course he is the supreme good of the universe, and if he is to exercise his will towards an object, it must be toward himself. He is the only one who can truly delight himself, and he is never delighted in us, except in so far as we are the means by which he is seen. He is never delighted in us as we are in ourselves, but only as he is found in us. So his delight is in himself, and his delight in his creatures, is delight in the creatures for his own sake, or for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, one of the members of the Trinity.

So his willing toward his creatures is not a striving to obtain something or a sign of infelicity as if he were unhappy and needed us in order to be happy. It's for his glory that he has created us, and it is for the further manifestation of himself that creation has taken place. We must not think of God as a person who is lonely and needed us. He did not need us except in so far as through us there may be a manifestation of the glory of God. *Soli deo Gloria*, the reformers and other sound theologians have stressed. To God alone be the glory.

Well, one might say, "Well, God then, the kind of God you Christians talk about is a God who's consumed with self love." Yes, that's right. That's right. He is consumed

with self love, in the sense in which we are speaking about him because if he were to love something else, it would be to love something inferior to himself, so his self love, it's proper to speak of his self love, and he is consumed with his self love, but in the process of the manifestation of himself, he has in wonderful grace included us, and we share in the consumption of himself with self love in so far as we have come to be identified with him, and through us he manifests his own great attributes. He is not, in the final analysis, an egotistical person in the sense in which we speak of people who are egotistical. The connotations are blasphemous if we think of God as egotistical in the sense that we use the term, but in the case of this one perfect being, he can only ultimately be satisfied in himself.

Now, I think for the sake of time, we should turn on to consider the moral attributes of God, the goodness of God. We said, you know, to be wrong about the attributes of God, is to be wrong about God because they have to do with the perfections of the divine being and nature, and it's not an impossible thing to be wrong about God. Not long ago I was reading something written by a man who was a teacher of theology in a theological institution that was largely a sound institution, and he was expatiating on the fact that God was a changeable God, and that he was not a static God, but in that particular statement he was denying the immutability of God, and it's very easy to fall into error concerning the nature of God, and inevitably if we fall into the error concerning the nature of God, it will reflect itself in our daily life. It will reflect itself in the way men deal with their wives, and wives with their husbands, and parents with their children, and employers with employees, and employees with employers because your concept of God ultimately determines everything.

The moral attributes that I want to consider are the goodness of God the holiness of God and the justice of God. Among the ethical attributes, first place is usually assigned to goodness. The Greeks identified goodness with usefulness, but in the Bible it is the sum total of the divine perfections. Again, Professor Berkhof, he has a happy way of

defining things relatively briefly. He defines it as that perfection that prompts him to deal bountifully and kindly with his creatures. In two senses God is good. He is absolute good, that is perfection and bliss are in God. And he is active good, being the fountain and cause of all good that takes place. One of the interesting things about the goodness of God and one that we sometimes forget is this. He makes distinctions in his gifts of goodness.

Now, people don't like that. Many of my Christian friends don't like that. They like to think of God as a good God who treats everybody the same way. Well, he is a good God, but he makes distinctions. Now, let me just show you some of the distinctions he makes, so that you'll have to agree with me. He gives some things to animals that he doesn't give to men. And he gives some things to men that he doesn't give to animals. In fact, we would say men have been given more than animals. There's hardly a person here that would rather be an animal than a man, and then he gives some things to some men, and he give some things to other men that are better. For he elects some men and he does not elect others. Regardless of your doctrine of election, the Bible speaks of elect men.

Now, that stirs up people, but nevertheless it's biblical. Now, it's much safer, if you want to prove something to talk about angels because we are so selfish, we are not as interested in angels' destinies and experiences with God, but you read the Bible, and you know that the Bible teaches that there are elect angels, and there are non elect angels. The Bible speaks of elect angels, so he gives some angels some things that he does not give to others, so God is good, but you see distinctions in his gifts of goodness. The fact that there are distinctions does not mean that he is not good. He may give one person more than he gives somebody else, but be good to both. You don't have to give the same thing to everyone or thing in order to be good. The varieties of the divine goodness are expressed in other terms, which are very familiar to us. For example, the love of God is one aspect of his goodness.

Now, love stands, I think, in the first place because it's so much a part of God that the Bible says, "God is love." The prophets particularly show forth God's love, and they show it forth unto two figures. There is the figure of conjugal love, that is the love of a man for his wife, or a wife for her husband, married love, and then in the figure of paternal love. The love of a father for a child, so these are the two figures that express the love of God in the prophets particularly. The Greek words say a great deal of the same thing.

There are, as you know, several different words that are used for love, in the Greek language. One of them erato from which we get erotic, eroticism is a word that is not found in the New Testament. It is a word that speaks of sexual love. One of the students of this particular word and the other words has said, "This is the love of taking." Erotic love, sexual love. Then the Bible speaks of the terms philia, philia kind of love. It's the kind of love that people have for one another, because they have a mutual interest in things, and so they grow to love one another because they have mutual interests. That kind of love is a give and take kind of love, and then in the New Testament there is stressed agape. Agape is the word that speaks of love as that given by God and often involving sacrifice. It's the love of giving. So we have the love of take, the love of give and take, and the love of giving, and that's the greatest expression of the love of God is that agape kind of love.

One of the definitions of the theologian is that perfection of God by which he has eternally moved to self-communication. So the idea of the love of God then is the sacrificial giving of God to a particular object.

Now, this love of God is a love that is especially directed toward the elect of God, and the Bible says that love is not traceable to their works. He doesn't love them because of the things that they do. It's not traceable to their faith. He doesn't love them because they have faith. As a matter of fact, God loves men not because they faith, but the have faith because God loves them. He is the one who has loved them and given them faith,

and so we must not reverse those things. His love is eternal. It's as eternal as his love for the Son. Love then is at the top of the list of those virtues that we think of when we think of the goodness of God.

The grace of God is another of the expressions of the goodness of God. If Scripture had revealed all of the attributes except this one, then it would have been of no value to us. What we need, since we are sinners, is grace. Grace is God's unmerited goodness to those who are by nature under condemnation.

Now, the grace of God is sovereign grace. It's independent of human merit. It is common or general, and it special or particular. It is electing grace. It is redeeming grace, and we have many illustrations of that in our minds I am sure.

Now, for the sake of time again, I am not going say anything about the mercy of God and the long suffering of God, but these are things that also may be classified as belonging to the goodness of God. One of the problems of divine goodness, which has plagued students of the Bible and of theology for a long time, is this perennial problem, which we may put in this way. If God is good why is there sin, suffering, and slow progress in redemption?

Now, many rational answers have been given to this. Some have denied evil, like the Christian Scientists. It's only a subjective reality and so on. Some have denied God's ability to prevent evil. In the latter case, it's usually claimed that God must of necessity limit himself. It's almost to say that God must have necessity refused to be God, if we are to retain responsibility. Free agency it claimed is inconsistent with certainty. God may argue pursue, but he cannot sovereignly govern, but as Hodge says, "If this so, then God cannot govern free agents. He cannot secure the accomplishment of his purposes or the fulfillment of his promises, and so we ultimately must acknowledge that it is God who is sovereign in his love and in his goodness and in his grace."

The Scriptural answer based on the fact that the glory of God is the end to which all other ends are subordinated is that God's self manifestation is the highest possible



good. That's the end of all of his works in creation and providence and redemption, and sentient creatures, thinking creatures, are necessary for this manifestation, and there can be no manifestation of mercy without misery, and there can be no manifestation of grace and justice without sin, and so the knowledge of God is for us, the highest good because it's eternal life, and in order to manifest himself fully, he must have misery and also sin.

In connection with the holiness of God, some attributes we prefer because of the benefits we derive from them. We prefer his goodness before his power. He prefers his mercy before his justice, but God delights in his attributes because of their excellencies, and if this is so then due to the stress upon holiness, a case might be made for it, being the transcendent attribute. It runs through the rest, and casts its luster upon them. God has set forth in his holiness more than by any other of his perfections.

Among the remarkable things said about God's holiness, are these. It's a term used by God to describe himself. It's the term used by the Lord Jesus of himself. It's the term used of the third person of the Trinity as his title Holy Spirit. It's ascribed by the persons of the Trinity of one another. The Spirit ascribes holiness to the Son and the Father, the Father to the Son and the Spirit, the Spirit to the Son and the Father. They ascribe this term to themselves. In fact, his name, which signifies all of his attributes in conjunction, is said in the Bible to be holy and reverent. Holiness is two fold in character. It's his absolute transcendence and his supreme majesty, and in this sense it's hardly a moral attribute because it expresses his transcendence over everything. When theologians speak of God as the Holy other, they are speaking of him in his holiness as one who is separated, and therefore distinct from us. It is also used of his absolute moral purity.

Now, one of the greatest exhibitions, I think, in the Bible of the holiness of God is found in the 6th chapter of the book of Isaiah, and what I would like for you to do know, is to turn with me to that 6th chapter, and let me just read a few verses here, and try to point out what is stated here about this holiness of God. The 6th chapter of Isaiah has been called the making of a prophet, and it's a great proclamation of divine holiness.

What is described here is Isaiah's cleansing, his call and his commission. Now, notice the vision in verses 1 through 4,

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."

The occasion of this great revelation is described in the opening phrases, "In the year that King Uzziah died." Now, this date tells us not only when, but why Isaiah had the vision. Uzziah had been a great king. In fact Uzziah's name means, Yahweh his strength. He's also given the name. Azariah, Yahweh his helper, but he had ended his long reign in a lepers house, and it is clear from what is revealed in the chronicles in Kings about this great king that there was a great deal of opportunity for hero worship on the part of the people because he had done so much for them, but what this prophecy is designed to express is the fact that though the scepter may fall on the earth, it does not fall from above. When earthly props are swept away, he appears, and so in the year that King Uzziah died, and everyone felt let down, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne.

Now, the seraphim around the throne, and the term seraphim means literally burners. They were angelic being associated with the presence of God, and the attitudes of reverence and activity prevail. They sing of the utter otherness of God, his holiness. There is no failure in the case of the Lord God as there was in Uzziah, who died in the leper's house. Then Isaiah writes about the cleansing. He is holy. It's true, but he is also the holy one of Israel, and so he meets with us, and he cleanse us, and so we read here,

"And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him who cried, and the house was filled with smoke, then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips,

and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."

And notice the restoration. The confession comes first, and the sight of the presence of the Lord leads Isaiah to recognize the sense of sin within his own being. This is one of the things that we lack in evangelicalism today. Easy going evangelicalism has no deep sense of sin because it has no clear vision of God, and so evangelicalism, likes to think of mans need as being restoration to happiness, restoration to psychological adjustment or things such as this, but they do not recognize because of their easy going superficiality that man's need is far deeper than happiness. Man's need is far deeper than some kind of psychological adjustment. Man's need is based upon the fact that he is a sinner, and he is on his way to divine, ultimately divine punishment in the Lake of Fire. He is a sinner. He is guilty. He is under condemnation, and his need is that great, and I say one of the reasons we have no clear perception of our self is because we have no clear vision of God.

There are three besetting sins of the religious people, callousness in worship. You can see it in Believer's Chapel. You can see people come in Sunday after Sunday and you can notice, if you live long enough, have lived long enough, you can notice that there is a time in their life when they are fresh and vital in spiritual things. They are listening to the things that are taught them by the various teachers, and they are growing in grace, and then you can see reach a plain where things seem to be not progressing so well, not making so much progress. They seem to have fallen into a state of existence on a certain level from which they never recover, and then you can see them come, and you

can tell they really don't want to be there at all. They'd much rather be somewhere else. That's one of the sad things about human nature and it manifests itself in callousness, in the expression of the worship of God. Suddenly we become content. We go to Believer's Chapel, or we go to some other evangelical church where the Bible is preached, but we don't really study the Bible and grow in the knowledge of the Lord God. We become content with the fact that we have some form of adherence to the word of God and to the truth of God, and then there is carelessness in life, and sooner or later worldliness manifests itself, and even sin, and we get to the place where we smile at sin, the things that really displease the Lord God. There is one cure, and it is the vision of the Lord and the voice of the *tres bagion*. Well, the prophet goes on to speak about the cleansing that came from the Lord God. The altar reminding us of the truth of sacrifice, and then of course comes the commission.

We have just a couple of minutes, I do want to say just one or two things about the justice of God, so we'll have to drop the holiness of God for a moment. Justice is related to his holiness. Shedd calls justice a mode of holiness. In his moral nature, he is holy. In his dealings with his rational creatures, he is just. When we speak of justice, we are generally speaking of the idea of conformity to a rule or to a standard, and so God is just in the sense that he conforms to a particular rule or a particular standard. It is the standard expressed by his will in his word and by his being. The justice of God may be divided into three classes or classifications, three parts, rectoral justice, distributive justice and redemptive justice. His rectoral justice is the rectitude with which he rules both the good and the evil. In other words, it is his moral government of the universe. He is the rector of this universe. His distributive justice is the justice or the rectitude by which he executes his will. That is he rewards both men and angels, and he also inflicts penalties.

Now, when we speak about inflicting penalties, we are talking about the retributive justice of God. That's part of his distributive justice. So he remunerates, according to certain principles expressed in his word. All are of grace ultimately, and he

also inflicts penalties necessary because of sin and perdition. The wrath of God is part of his distributive justice, and finally his redemptive justice, is that justice that manifested in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's really synonymous practically with his loving kindness. It's synonymous with his grace. It's the justice, which he exercises when he punishes the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins, thus freeing his love for the expression of his love toward his people.

Now, the retributive justice of God is taught very plainly in Romans chapter 1. For the sake of time, we cannot look there, but I suggest that you read Romans chapter 1, verse 24 through verse 32, where the justice of God is expressed in its retributive form very plainly. Well, we have gone for one hour, and we have only touched the high spots of these great truths that have to do with our God. If you are here tonight, and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a holy God with whom you have to do. One who is in his holiness, separated and yet at the same time so pure, that when he executes justice it is like fire. He is also a just God, and he governs his universe according to the standards expressed in his word. He is also a good God who offers grace and redemption to all men through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We invite you to come to him. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, who has died for sinners. You have a great need. It is not for adjustment of a psychological nature. It's not for happiness. It is for redemption and deliverance, from the Lake of Fire and eternal judgment. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for these wonderful manifestations in the word of God of aspects of Thy being, and we pray Lord that we who are a part of easy going evangelicalism may realize the greatness of our triune God, the holiness, the justice the righteous, as well as the love and the mercy and the grace. Enable us to walk carefully before Thee, humbly before Thee, and oh, God, give us a desire to please Thee. Deliver us from callousness in our worship. Deliver us from adherence to mere form and

all of the things that we do that have to do with spiritual things. Restore to us that vitality that so many of us manifested when we were young in the faith.

Oh, God give us a great desire to advance beyond our present stage of spiritual experience to new stages and new experiences of the wonderful grace of God. Oh, God, work in the lives of each one present here to that end, and in this assembly in which there are so many who have put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Preserve us from heresy. Preserve us from evil, and as a body of believer's oh, God, enable us to advance and grow and be useful to Thee in the plans and purposes that Thou hast for this world of which we are a part. Evidently, Lord, Thou hast great things for us to do for we are still here. Enable us to please Thee in doing them, for Jesus' sake. Amen.