

**King's Online Bible School**

**Doctrine 101: Learning about God** — Spotlight Studies

(adapted from Wayne Grudem's *Bible Doctrines* & R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths*)

**God is Omnipresent** (Lesson 6)

**1. "I AM"**

Eternity does not exist of itself. It is the word we use to refer to the infinite duration that is the result of God existing.

The entire Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in His one indivisible essence is equally present in every instant of His eternal duration. He is without beginning and He lives forever and ever.

Because we experience life as a succession of moments (one moment at a time), our awareness of time is past, present, and future. Each present moment quickly becomes a past moment. As a result, when we think of God being eternal, we think of His eternal past (that He has always existed) and of His eternal future (that He will exist forever). We sing of Him "Who was, Who is, and Who is to come."

But there is more for us to see. God's eternal existing is not divided into past and future. He never leaves the past and He is already in the future. It is all always present to Him. There has never been a future "then" for which God must wait and nothing will ever become a past "then" to God.

All the past, present, and future, eternal and created, is always immediately "now" to Him. He abides in them all constantly and simultaneously. He is "I Am."

This was God's revelation to Moses, when God called him and Moses asked His name: "I AM WHO I AM; Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you" (Exod 3:14).

Moses' prayer (Psalm 90) declares the contrast between God's infinite and constant immediacy and man's momentary experience of passing time:

"For a thousand years in Your sight  
Are like yesterday when it passes by,  
Like a watch in the night" (Ps 90:4).

Moses shows that he grasps the implications. The reality of God's uninterrupted presence establishes Him as the home we never leave.

"Lord, a dwelling place You have been to us  
In generation and generation,  
Before mountains were brought forth  
Or ever You had given birth to earth and world.  
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Ps 90:1-2).

David bases his confidence and courage on a similar conclusion:

"But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord,  
I say, 'You are my God.'  
My times are in Your hand" (Ps 31:14-15).

Because God is eternal, He alone is the One Who handles my past, present, and future according to His perfect determinations for me, His creature.

Jesus confronts the Jews with the totality of His eternal presence as God's Son:

"Before Abraham was born, I AM!" (Jn 8:58)

George Macdonald reflects on this wonder in his *Diary of an Old Soul*. His March 2nd meditation begins with the way we experience sunsets and builds to the declaration in the last line: how God experiences them!

Gloriously wasteful, O my Lord, art Thou!  
Sunset faints after sunset into the night,  
Splendourously dying from Thy window-sill —  
For ever. Sad our poverty doth bow  
Before the riches of Thy making might:  
Sweep from Thy space Thy systems at Thy will —  
In Thee the sun sets every sunset still.

*Questions for reflection:*

1. What does the fact that God is and always will be present in every moment of your life tell you about His forgiveness?
2. What does it tell you about God's presence in Jesus' life, suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection?
3. What does it tell you about God's presence, will, power, and authority in answering your prayers?

## **2. God's Infinite Presence**

As infinite spirit, God can only always be everywhere in His creation. The word that is used to express the wonder of His infinite presence is "immensity."

While angelic beings and spirits have no physical bodies or properties, they are finite and can only be present in one place at any particular time. But there is nowhere in heaven or earth where God is not always present.

As Solomon exclaims in his prayer at the dedication of the temple: "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You!" (1 Kings 8:27)

Because the universe is God's finite creation, His presence is necessarily greater. God cannot be contained by any space.

But it is not accurate to conclude that God extends outside the universe in every direction in unending space, because this is thinking about Him in spatial terms and, because God is Spirit, His presence is not a spatial presence. God is a being who exists without size or dimensions in space.

"Before God created the universe, there was no matter or material, so there was no space either. Yet God still existed. Where was God? He was not in a place that we could call a "where," for there was no "where" or space. But God still was! . . . He exists as a kind of being that is far greater than we can imagine" (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 175).

### 3. God's Full Presence

The prefix "omni"- in the word "omnipresence" refers not only to the universal extent of God's being, but also to how "fully" He is present — how much of Him is in any given place at all times. He is not just partially present everywhere. His immensity must not be understood to suggest that as infinite spirit He is stretched out over the universe so that He is not completely present anywhere. God is fully present everywhere.

As spirit, God does not occupy any place in the sense that physical objects occupy space. He has no physical being that takes up space. There is no distance of space between us and God.

"‘Am I a God Who is near,’ declares Yahweh,  
 ‘And not a God far off?  
 Can a man hide himself in hiding places,  
 So I do not see him?’ declares Yahweh.  
 ‘Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?’ declares the Lord" (Jer 23:23-24).

David recognizes and confesses the wonder of God's immediate presence everywhere:

"You have enclosed me behind and before,  
 And laid Your hand upon me.  
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
 It is too high, I cannot attain to it.

Where can I go from Your Spirit?  
 Or where can I flee from Your presence?  
 If I ascend to heaven, You are there;  
 If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.

If I take the wings of the dawn,  
 If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,  
 Even there Your hand will lead me,  
 And Your right hand will lay hold of me.

My frame was not hidden from You,  
 When I was made in secret,  
 And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;  
 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance" (Ps 139:5-10, 15-16).

Paul declares how very close and how very essential God's immensity is for all created existence:

"‘In Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:27-28).

#### 4. God's Enabling Presence

It is God's presence that keeps the universe and everything in it functioning in the way that He intends. If God would remove His presence for one millisecond, then that from which He removed His presence would disintegrate.

Because there are those who will be separated from God forever, we think of hell as a place where God is not present. But hell would not exist unless God created it, and He is present in all His creation, sustaining its existence for His purposes and will. He has prepared hell as the place where His enemies will exist forever (by His sustaining will and presence and power) in the torment and dying that only knows His wrath, cut off from Him eternally.

"In Him all things hold together" (Col 1:17).

"He upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb 1:3). Christ is present, upholding every atom and molecule in the universe by the word of His power. The ability of a stone to hold together is not in a power its molecular structure possesses independently; it is because Christ enables it to be.

How much more this is evident in living creatures, which are so vulnerable and so dependent on breath and complex inner physical processes for every second of their existence.

Thou dost take away their breath, they expire,  
And return to their dust.  
Thou dost send forth Thy breath, they are created;  
And Thou dost renew the face of the ground (Ps 104:29-30).

"He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:25).

#### 5. God's Holy Presence

"In Him (God's beloved Son) all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17).

He is everywhere in His fullness, causing and sustaining every aspect of His creation for His own sake.

All things are held together in the Son, but they do not become God or part of God. They exist by His will and by the enabling power of His presence.

It is all constantly dependent on Him and His will. The universe and everything that fills it exists as the ongoing demonstration of His goodness, wisdom, power, and glory. It points to Him and it exists for His purposes.

"They all wait for You  
To give them their food in due season.  
You give to them, they gather up;  
You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good."

"You hide Your face, they are dismayed;  
You take away their spirit, they expire  
And return to their dust."

"You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;  
And You renew the face of the ground."

Let the glory of the Lord endure forever;  
Let the Lord be glad in His works!" (Ps 104:27-31)

He is always ensuring that all things are working toward the purposes of His will.

God is holy and remains distinct from His creation. It is the work of His hands and the result of His command, not an extension of Him. We live and move and exist in Him, but we do not become Him.

Every idea and teaching that we can discover God in us by centering on ourselves is false. It is the serpent's ancient lie, "You will be like God" (Gen 3:5).

"I am God, and there is no one like Me" (Isa 46:9).

"Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth;  
For I am God, and there is no other" (Isa 45:22).

"Then Job . . . fell to the ground and worshipped. He said,  
'Naked I came forth from the womb of my mother,  
And naked I shall return thither:  
Yahweh has given and Yahweh has taken;  
Blessed be the name of Yahweh'" (Job 1:20-21).

## **6. God with Men**

The word "omnipresent" draws attention particularly to the way God as infinite Spirit is constantly relating to every living person. The nature and effect of His immediate presence at every point in their existence is according to His wise and eternal purposes, His jealous right to them as their Creator, His witness to Himself, His great mercies, and His righteous determinations.

It is God Who determined the wages of sin — the just penalty for rebellion against Him and for each attitude, intention, word, and action that brings hurt and evil into His good creation.

"But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it, dying you will die" (Gen 2:17).

It is God Who promised that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).

It is God Who covered Adam's and Eve's shame with animal skins (Gen 3:21).

It is God Who drove man from the garden so that he and his race would not eat of the tree of life and live forever in separation from God (Gen 3:22-24).

It is God Who preserved physical dying so that His Son could become the human sacrifice for sin that would pay the ransom that restored men to Himself.

"Then Yahweh passed by in front of him (Moses) and proclaimed, 'Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; Who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, Who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished . . .'" (Exod 34:6-7).

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks" (Rom 1:18-21).

God is always responding to each person according to that individual's ways and deeds.

"I, Yahweh, search the heart,  
I test the mind,  
Even to give to each man according to his ways,  
According to the results of his deeds" (Jer 17:10).

"The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself."

"But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live."

"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord God, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?'" (Ezek 18:20-23).

"For the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness,  
According to the cleanness of my hands in His eyes."

"With the kind You show Yourself kind;  
With the blameless You show Yourself blameless;  
With the pure You show Yourself pure;  
And with the crooked You show Yourself astute.  
For You save an afflicted people,  
But haughty eyes You abase" (Ps 18:24-27).

## 7. God with His Children

We experience God's presence with us as a blessing and His presence in us as our very life. It is an unchanging, constant reality. But our experience of His presence varies.

God is present and working in our lives even when we experience a sense of distance from Him.

**a.** When we sin, we experience the effects of His sanctifying presence.

Whenever we turn aside to our own way, our lack of peace is the Holy Spirit drawing us back to abide in Jesus again.

"No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him" (1 John 3:6).

"Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God" (Isa 59:2).

"The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. By this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit Whom He has given us" (1 John 3:24).

Our Father is eager to draw us back into a deeper, chastened delight in His heart and His ways.

"God yearns jealously over the Spirit He has made to dwell in us."

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

"Purify your hearts, you double-minded."

"Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you" (Jms 4:5, 8, 10).

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

**b.** Disappointment is God's stage for building faith and trusting obedience in our lives.

Unanswered prayer, unrealized expectations, unexplained loss, unrelieved sickness and suffering, and unrestrained evil are some of the experiences that challenge our confidence in God's attentive care in our lives.

In fact and in reality, our disappointments place us right in the center of God's training program.

"In the days of His flesh, He (Jesus) offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, . . . Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things He suffered" (Heb 5:7-8).

". . . Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, more precious than perishable gold, even though tested by fire, may be found to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:5-7).

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb 11:6).

"Now he was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1-3).

"In hope against hope he (Abraham) believed, . . . Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform" (Rom 4:18-20).

"But My righteous one shall live by faith;  
And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

"But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" (Heb 10:38-39).

**c. God hides His face from us so that we will seek Him.**

In His wisdom and His intimate knowledge of each of our lives, God draws us beyond the ways of knowing Him with which we are familiar. He wants to reveal Himself in ways that are new in our experience. His Spirit breaks through our soul's limitations in apprehending spiritual things with new light from His Word, broadening our capacity and readiness to believe His presence, to discern His voice, and to do His bidding.

"And He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 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" (Rom 8:27-28).

"For the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him" (1 Chron 28:9).

"He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb 11:6).

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matt 7:7-8).



## 8. God's Designated Presence

In His determination to enter into relationship with men and women in this world and in the new heavens and earth, God as infinite spirit, present everywhere, also "positions Himself," designating places as His sanctuaries and the centers from which He rules His creation and His people.

As He works out His salvation plan in man's history, God's dwelling places correspond to each context in which His people experience being set apart as His own.

### a. In the wilderness:

"Let them construct a sanctuary for Me. . . . And there I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel" (Ex 25:22).

"There are those . . . who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, 'See,' He says, 'that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain'" (Heb 8:4-5).

### b. In the promised land:

"For Yahweh has chosen Zion;  
He has desired it for His habitation.  
'This is My resting place forever;  
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it'" (Ps 132:13-14).

"The Lord is in His holy temple;  
The Lord's throne is in heaven" (Ps 11:4).

### c. In Jesus' new creation and His body, the Church:

"We have such a high priest, Who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb 8:1).

"Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21, 23).

"Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23).

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, Whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1 Cor 6:19).

"And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, on the one hand, but on the other hand, by God, chosen and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

"For this is contained in Scripture:

'Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner foundation,  
And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed'" (1 Peter 2:4-6).

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst" (Matt 18:20).

**d.** In the promise and anticipation of our inheritance:

"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. . . . But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them" (Heb 11:13, 16).

"For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven" (2 Cor 5:1-2).

**e.** As the community of faith in this world:

"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood . . ." (Heb 12:22-24).

"Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come" (Heb 13:12-14).

**f.** In the new heavens and the new earth:

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them'" (Rev 21:2-3).