

Friday, September 19, 2008

## **JAZZ AND THEOLOGY**

I love to sing old Hymns in Worship. When it comes to instrumental music to relax with, I enjoy certain kinds of Jazz (as well as certain kinds of Classical Music). Here is a very interesting essay about Jazz and Theology. It is written by a conservative Evangelical professor of theology who compares his theory with another theory on the subject by James I Packer, well-known Reformed Theologian, who also enjoys Jazz (as did another one of my favorite Reformed Scholars, Hans Rookmaaker). <http://www.tesm.edu/sh/2008-4/jazz>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 08:03

## **A LINK TO THE WORDS OF OLD HYMNS**

I chose a favorite Hymn for my QT Thots this morning. Many folks we know are struggling with things in their lives and the words of the song seemed very appropriate and helpful. The hymn, "Be Still My Soul", and many other classic, old time favorites can be found at <http://www.preciouslordtakemyhand.com/christianhymns>

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 07:53

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

## **THE SUFFERING AND DEATH OF A 12 YEAR OLD**

The 12 year old daughter of friends of friends passed away yesterday, having struggled with Leukemia and its treatment for a long, long time. We had joined many other friends in praying for her healing. It has been up and down, but a few days ago, the family was encouraged- the bone marrow transplant had worked. But complications took over and took Lexi's earthly life away. Why didn't God heal her? Today's QT Time included Psalm 30, in which the dying Psalmist prayed for healing and it was granted. His earthly life was spared. He had argued with God saying he would not be able to serve Him from the grave. Being healed, he now would do just that. Perhaps there is a clue here about why Lexi passed away at 12.

Perhaps her work here was done. God's purposes for her were fulfilled. I don't really know, of course, but that is plausible. But what about all her many months of pain and suffering? And that of her family as well? Had that served some purpose, too? On Monday, the Pope spoke to sick people at Lourdes, France. It was an anti-euthanasia message. Life on earth must be allowed to continue to its natural end, we must not interfere for any reason to end that life. That begs the question about interfering to prolong that same life, long after it would have naturally ended. Such "heroic measures" to sustain life could be interpreted as being against the will of God as much as those efforts to end that life, if the single criteria is "let nature have its way". The Pope is quoted as saying the sick should pray to find "the grace to accept, without fear or bitterness, to leave this world at the hour chosen by God." But isn't this very thing what much medicine and medical treatment is about? To fight, not accept, the ravages of disease, to put off "the hour chosen by God" at all costs (literally)? Are we not mandated by God and Scripture to be pro life, pro living, and not to passively endure suffering? Where do we draw the line? Certainly we believe, don't we, that our life and days are in the Lord's hand (control). Theoretically, we believe that, too, about our conception and birth as well. Life is a gift from God. He gives and He takes. And we believe in Heaven- the very moment we draw our last breath here on earth we enter into the Glory of the Lord! Wonderful. Fighting like Hell to stay out of Heaven is not only contradictory, it is utter foolishness and for the loved ones of the ill person to encourage this could be utterly selfish. So we come down, at least in the matter of definite terminal illness, not to fighting death itself, but to the matter of suffering. Many who endure suffering are courageous, but I find nothing admirable in suffering itself. Maybe the issue is to do whatever it takes to eliminate or minimize suffering, while not artificially prolonging or ending life.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 15:25

Monday, September 15, 2008

## **DECLINE OF DEMOCRACY: a concern for Christians?**

China spent the last 7 years getting ready for the Olympics. They spent billions to clean-up, fix-up, modernize and construct buildings for the Event. The USA spent the last 7 years and billions seeking to end the threat of another terrorist attack like "9/11". Which Country accomplished the most for their effort? - got the most value for their money?

According to an article on the subject in Wikipedia-"The War on Terrorism (also known as the War on Terror) is the common term for the various military, political and legal actions initiated by the United States government, in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks. The official objectives of the 2001 War on Terrorism are to counter terrorist threats, prevent terrorist acts and curb the influence of terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda." There have been 69 alleged terrorists acts or attempted acts and responses by the USA in these seven years. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are part of this larger War on Terrorism. There had been previous attacks, attempts to attack and threats to attack before 9/11. Our Country entered Afghanistan immediately after 9/11 to seek and destroy the terrorist organization, Al-Qaida, led by Osama bin Laden. The latter were responsible for the deaths of the approximately 3000 innocent people we recently commemorated. They were driven from that Country into Pakistan where they are still very strong and active. In Afghanistan, another terrorist organization, the Taliban, is also still alive and well. This means the War on Terrorism is still very much with us. But there is a whole other dimension to this War. With respect to defining his policy known as the War on Terror, President Bush has stated that: "...today's war on terror is like the Cold War. It is an ideological struggle with an enemy that despises freedom and pursues totalitarian aims....I vowed then that I would use all assets of our power of Shock and Awe to win the war on terror. And so I said we were going to stay on the offense two ways: one, hunt down the enemy and bring them to justice, and take threats seriously; and two, spread freedom." [my emphasis added][http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War\\_on\\_Terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_on_Terrorism) Spreading "freedom" and democracy (and to resist threats to the same) is the current definition of the "Bush Doctrine" and the proposed mission of America in the world. How are we doing? What is the state of political freedom in the world today. How big is this mission? Here are some results from the latest survey on this subject by Freedom House-The population of the world as estimated in mid-2007 was 6,604.9 million persons, who reside in 193 sovereign states. The level of political rights and civil liberties as shown comparatively by the Freedom House survey is: Free: 3,028.2 million (46 percent of the world's population) live in 90 of the states. Partly Free: 1,185.3 million (18 percent of the world's population) live in 60 of the states. Not Free: 2,391.4 million (36 percent of the world's population) live in 43 of the states. The year also saw the intensification of an effort by authoritarian regimes to consolidate their power through the suppression of democratic opposition, civil society, and independent media—a process also known as the pushback against democracy. Freedom of association suffered a setback on a global scale, as governments in various regions initiated policies to weaken or neutralize nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), human rights monitoring groups, and trade unions. Especially important in carrying out this assault on civil society were a group of market-oriented autocracies and energy-rich dictatorships that combine elements of a capitalist economy with sophisticated techniques of political repression. These were among the principal findings of Freedom in the World 2008, Freedom House's annual survey of political rights and civil liberties worldwide. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=130&year=2008> A related article about the decline of democracy in the world is here-[http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2008/09/14/democracy\\_on\\_the\\_wane/?page=1](http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2008/09/14/democracy_on_the_wane/?page=1) Is belief in political and economic freedom a Biblical belief? Is the pursuit of such freedom, as well as its defense against its enemies, a Biblical duty for our Nation? for Christians? Yes, Yes and Yes

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 14:26

Saturday, September 13, 2008

## **9/11, MUSLIMS and MISSIONS**

My sermons, back in the day, occasionally would provoke negative reaction- none more so than the one I preached after 9/11! It was nice to see the abundance of little American flags planted on people's lawns all around town. In my opinion, there was little reaction other wise. "Hey, we don't live in NYC or DC" I did not sense any great grief or anger on the part of most local folks, certainly nothing that lasted but a few days. For awhile, I was very disappointed that I was living in such a town and not in NYC or DC. I was living far from the part of the world where important things were happening. Then I realized I was where God had put me for that time. I had a work to do for Him there, not in some major metropolitan area. From the pulpit I challenged the congregation with the need for missions. The Terrorists, after all, were Muslims. The urgent need then, even more now, is missionary work in Muslim countries or, especially, among Muslim students in colleges throughout the USA. I laid out the need, in my mind, to increase our missionary outreach to Muslims and that a realistic way we could do that would be, among other things, to enlarge our Christian Education program to equip and prepare the children of our church to be witnesses to Muslims and others on the college campuses and cities where they would be living in the years ahead. Some folks were very upset with me over what they thought they were hearing me say that day. I still believe what I actually said is, and was, a capital idea! A far more effective response to the 9/11 attack than those little flags. How many families in your church are raising their children with a vision of becoming missionaries for Christ- anywhere?

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 10:46

## **THE BUSH DOCTRINE and MR.GIBSON**

I had thought Charlie Gibson was more fair. I was disappointed, actually, put out, with him for the way he conducted his first interview with Sarah Palin. Charles Krauthammer said it all-"Charlie Gibson ...looked down his nose and over his glasses with weary disdain, sighing and "sounding like an impatient teacher," as the Times noted. In doing so, he captured perfectly the establishment snobbery and intellectual condescension that has characterized the chattering classes' reaction to the mother of five who presumes to play on their stage." Ms Palin was correct in asking for clarification, because there have been four definitions of the "Bush Doctrine". Mr Krauthammer explains-"The fourth and current definition of the Bush doctrine, the most sweeping formulation of the Bush approach to foreign policy and the one that most clearly and distinctively defines the Bush years: the idea that the fundamental mission of American foreign policy is to spread democracy throughout the world. It was most dramatically enunciated in Bush's second inaugural address: "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world." [emphasis added]"Not the Gibson doctrine of preemption. Not the "with us or against us" no-neutrality-is-permitted policy of the immediate post-9/11 days. Not the unilateralism that characterized the pre-9/11 first year of the Bush administration." <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/12/AR2008091202457.html?tid=informbox&#8834;=AR>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 10:37

Friday, September 12, 2008

## **BAFFLE GRAB ON THE FLAKE**

"We need change, all right. Change from a liberal Washington to a conservative Washington. We have a prescription for every American who wants change in Washington - throw out the big-government liberals."- Mitt Romney, Sept. 3, 2008 And then the gorilla run knee socks paint porno on the Cadillac. But school laughed and didn't we sing hats? Maybe you wonder what the preceding gobbledygook means. I would ask which gobbledygook you mean: mine or Mitt Romney's? If he's allowed to spew nonsense and people act as if he's spoken intelligently, why can't I? If he gets to behave as if words no longer have objective meaning, why can't I? I mean, baffle grab on the freak flake. Really. And people hear this Orwellian doublespeak ... and cheer. Why not? They have been taught that words mean what you need them to in a given moment. And all [that] costs us is language, the ability to have reasoned and intelligent political discourse, the idea that words do, and should, have weight, dimension and intrinsic meaning. Maybe you disagree. In which case, let me just say this: Piffle crack eat monkey snow." This is from both a clever and educational article by Leonard Pitt.

He lambastes Mitt Romney for what the Governor said in a recent speech. Mr. Pitt accuses Mr. Romney of spouting gobbledygook, which he then illustrates with statements like "Piffle crack eat monkey snow." It is true that college students in Literary Theory classes are taught that words can mean anything you want them to mean. They have no intrinsic, objective meaning. This argument is used to denigrate the Bible and claims made to understand it. Conservative Evangelicals believe the words of Scripture do, indeed, have objective meaning and that we can know what that is. Scripture is not gobbledygook. But gobbledygook does not make a sentence. There is no subject or predicate in gobbledygook. There is no structure, no syntax, no grammar in something like "Piffle crack eat monkey snow." That is just a string of words. Mr Pitt is really accusing Mr. Romney of using normal sentences to say things that are untrue. This he says is intellectual dishonesty. He says Mr. Romney's sentences do violence to language and logic. Gobbledygook does that. Mr. Romney's statements do not do that. The Governor's sentences are fine. He just uses them to say things Mr. Pitt disagrees with. That does not make Mr. Romney's statements nonsense as statements. What Mr. Pitt is really accusing the Governor of doing is doublespeak. This means the Governor uses words with a different or opposite meaning than usual and does not tell anybody that. People hear him say one thing, when he is really saying something else by the same words. Did Mr. Romney do this in his speech? This is dishonest when it happens and it happens all the time but it did not happen with this speech in question. To me, Mr. Romney spoke the truth because I agree with him, i.e.- I agree with the definition of the words as he used them. Mr. Pitt, hearing the same speech, heard something else because he disagrees with Mr. Romney. His words meant something different to Mr. Pitt. It would be good if we need could get every one to agree on the definitions of the words they use. That once was far more possible in America say 100 years ago, even 50 years ago, than now. Most people agreed on the meaning of words like freedom, justice, God, marriage, peace, morality, human rights, common good, patriotism, poverty, honesty, charity and truth. Folks may not have agreed with the meaning, but they agreed on what the meaning was. And that was because some 100 years ago, most Americans shared a common language and Religion and the same basic moral and social values (even when they did not follow them). Hence, words meant the same thing to most of us. Gobbledygook and Doublespeak were not the problem we have now. Although we need to get every one to agree on the definitions of the words they use, I believe those days of sharing a common language and Religion and the same basic moral and social values by the majority are long gone.

[http://www.sunjournal.com/story/281874-3/Columnist/Romneys\\_classic\\_case\\_of\\_intellectual\\_dishonesty/](http://www.sunjournal.com/story/281874-3/Columnist/Romneys_classic_case_of_intellectual_dishonesty/)

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 15:36

## **TROPIC CASCADE and GAY MARRIAGE**

Many commentators on the subject of gay marriage here in Massachusetts love to say the sky did not fall when it became legal. The world did not end. So what was all the alarm? The alarm was about long term, not immediate, effects of the acceptance of gay marriage in our society. Ideas have consequences, often unintended. This is one of them. Another one, to illustrate my point, is about the extermination of wolves in the 1920's and they damage that has caused in this Century "The extermination of wolves in the United States was a source of national pride in the early 20th century. Biologists thought livestock would be safe from marauders and game such as elk would flourish, leaving a bounty for hunters. But the consequences would ripple through the decades, affecting ecosystems in ways no 1920s wolf-hunting government biologist could have foreseen -- including altering rivers in Olympic National Park in

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Washington. Heavy elk grazing has transformed steep-sloped rivers densely bordered with vegetation into shallow, sediment-heavy flows, Oregon State University's Robert Beschta and William Ripple report this month in the journal *Ecohydrology*. These changed rivers may affect fisheries and local highways. The chain of events that results from the loss of a top predator is called a trophic cascade.” The change of events that will result from the acceptance of Gay Marriage will be, over time, the loss of Marriage as we have known it all our lives. That can be called a catas-trophic cascade![http://www.oregonlive.com/environment/index.ssf/2008/07/century\\_without\\_wolves\\_alters.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/environment/index.ssf/2008/07/century_without_wolves_alters.html)

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 15:29

Thursday, September 4, 2008

## **SARAH PALIN**

My wife and I thoroughly enjoyed the speeches at last night's RNC. We share the values and principles that were being declared so effectively. What we heard made us glad to be conservative, traditional Republicans. We were especially impressed by Sarah Palin! She was marvelous and conducted herself very, very well. I recommend all the articles in today's issue of National Review Online about Ms Palin and the Race. They are spot on and significant. [Click here to read article](#)

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 14:09

Wednesday, September 3, 2008

## **ATTRIBUTES OF GOD, continued**

Follow-up on the study of the Attributes of GodThe short study I posted [below] two days ago, about the attributes of God, comes out of a larger study and concern I have about Open Theism, as well as the changes I see in Theology among advocates of the Emergent and Missional church movements, which in turn are rooted in, or greatly influenced by, Post Modernism. I like the challenge and admit I have had to rethink some basic convictions I have held. This is good. The study itself leads to questions about God and Evil, the Trinity and Christology. Today's Essay (post) is a work in progress, as I think out loud about these things. The prior study is the jump off point and I build on it. This, of course is not final or definitive. We are, after all, dealing with mysteries with seeming paradoxes or contradictions and things that don't make sense logically. God is a spirit (non-corporeal) Being, a self-conscious, self-determining, free and self sufficient, immutable Person. He is essentially unlimited or infinite in relation to time and space. In relation to the created natural world, He is altogether Other, separate, holy or transcendent. We are made in His Image. Exactly how do we image such a Person?

It follows from the above, that we, too, must be essentially spirit Beings, but we are not non-corporeal. We have bodies. We are "of the earth" and mortal. [Long ago, I exchanged the tripartite (spirit, soul and body) view of Man for the view of Man as a unity of soul and body, inseparable now and in eternity. I am revisiting that concept]. We are self-conscious, self-determining and free Persons We are not immutable or self sufficient. We are in no way self-sufficient. We are limited and subject to contingencies of time and space. And we are subject to change and being changed!In relation to the created natural world, we are both holy or transcendent and very much, simultaneously, earth bound in the here and now. Unlike God, we have a "sin nature". Like God, we are free to make choices determined by our character or nature, but nonbelievers will always chose according to their sin nature. (Regeneration makes it possible for Believers to chose according to their new nature in Christ.) We actually hate our Maker and resist Him in our lives and refuse to serve Him, even though He is our maker and we share His Image. This sin nature is not a part of our personhood. It is not essential to who we are as the Image of God. It is a "disease" or intruder, not in us by creation and must be removed. We can not deny our spirit nature. Many seek to repress it, but all of us, inconsistently, but continually and unsuccessfully, seek to express or fulfill it in ways other than in God, as He intended.While God exists "apart from" or 'above' or 'outside' of the natural world, the Transcendent God is also always and everywhere present "in" it. (We can not describe God or His work without using spatial, and other, metaphors, as inadequate as they are.) God's presence in the world is what we call the Spirit of God or the "Holy Spirit". Although the Spirit is God, God is "greater than" the Spirit. The Spirit is the immanence of the transcendent God. He fills everything, everywhere. We all live and move and have our being in Him. In fact, we draw our very breath from Him. The Spirit works in and through material or physical agents and instruments (so-called "secondary causes") to accomplish God's work. He is not the same as His agents. They are not to be identified with Him, simply used by Him to accomplish God's purposes in the world and history. It can be said that these instruments or agents manifest God or make Him visible or reveal Him. This is especially true of the natural, created World and its elements. Likewise, it can be said that, while God is everywhere at all times, these manifestations of Him may be where His presence is especially found or experienced at any particular time or place. This includes visions, theophanies, appearances in clouds and fire, especially in regard to the Tabernacles and Temples, and miracles. The Spirit of God is particularly found in the hearts and lives of Believers everywhere. He "dwells" in them, although He does not literally need or have a "House". Before Pentecost, the Spirit "came upon" Believers, worked wonders and departed. After Pentecost, He came to abide in the Church permanently. But, God can not be confined or limited to the Church. Again, He is everywhere at all time, but because members of the Church are people of faith, God is able to particularly "fill" them with His love and peace and work through them in the world. God is manifested most of all in the Church when she is gathered for worship. He meets with the Faithful (manifests Himself to them) in their corporate praise of Him and through His Word and Sacraments when these are being received by them.What about Jesus on earth and, now, in "Heaven"?Scripture teaches that Jesus on earth was fully God and fully Man and that all the attributes of God apply to Jesus. Again, in review, God is a spirit (non-corporeal) Being, a self-conscious, self-determining, free and self sufficient, immutable Person. He is essentially unlimited or infinite in relation to time and space. In relation to the created natural world, He is altogether Other, separate, holy or transcendent. However, all the attributes of Man (as Man, the Image of God, not Man as sinner) must also apply simultaneously to Jesus. How can that be explained? Like all people, Jesus was essentially a spirit Being, but not non-corporeal. He had a body. He was a self-conscious, self-determining and free Person, but he was not immutable or self sufficient. He was born and he died. He had to eat and sleep. He had, and depended on, family and friends. He was opposed and murdered by enemies. He was limited by and subject to contingencies of time and space. He did not have omniscience or omnipotence. How could all of this be, while he had all the attributes of God at the same time?

The answer to that-He voluntarily limited himself in the use of those attributes that prevented him from acting as a normal man, especially his attributes of omniscience and omnipotence. In relation to the created natural world, Jesus, as every man, was both holy or transcendent and very much, simultaneously, earth bound in the here and now. However, not having the defect that humans have, a sin nature, Jesus was not a sinner. He did not hate our Maker and resist Him and refuse to serve Him. He did not deny his spirit nature and did commune with God. Somehow, the infinite, non-corporeal transcendent God who is immanent and fully present everywhere at all times throughout the time-space world, also became God both limited and corporeal (incarnated) in the man, Jesus. The difference between Jesus and all other humans was not qualitative. He was simultaneously both fully God and fully Man. Being fully Man as created, he was not fully Sinner. He was the perfect Man (the New Adam) and absolutely unique! How this is possible is unknown. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is a mystery clearly taught in Scripture and acceptable by faith alone and not logic. God was not confined to the body of Jesus during the incarnation. Jesus prayed to God as His Father "in Heaven". He came "down from Heaven" to do his Father's will, not his own. He would "ascend to Heaven" where His Father was. In contrast, God the Spirit, is fully everywhere at all times, unlimited and undivided. While Jesus was fully God, God was not fully Jesus. God included Jesus, but God was more than, other than, Jesus (language and metaphors are totally inadequate here).When Jesus ascended into "Heaven" after His resurrection, He remained fully God and fully Man. He re-entered the realm of the Eternal from which He had come. However, all his self-imposed limitations were laid aside. In Heaven, He is a spirit (non-corporeal) Being, a self-conscious, self-determining, free and self sufficient, immutable Person. His physical body remains, but it has been transformed or glorified. He is once again essentially unlimited or infinite in relation to time and space. His omniscience and omnipotence have been fully restored. In relation to the created natural world, He is altogether Other, separate, holy or transcendent. (I am open to the idea of that we are talking here about entering other dimensions.)Concurrently, the Holy Spirit remains in the world as the immanence of God. As God, the ascended Christ has all the attributes of Man as he was at Creation. He is the New Adam, the perfect Image of God. God is still "greater than" than Christ. But, He does not become absorbed back into God. He remains, at the Father's side, in the role of Head of the Church, the New Humanity. Together, the Risen Christ and His Church shall one day inhabit and enjoy together the New Heavens and the New Earth. (Again, a real heaven and earth, but transformed or redeemed- maybe in another dimension.) Neither the present earth nor Humanity on earth are His Body. He is Sovereign over the earth and Humanity, but He is not the Lord and Savior of them, as He is of the Church. The Risen Christ remains in communion with all his faithful People, those in Heaven now with Him, as well as those still one earth. The Church, His Body, lives by virtue of its union with its Head. His resurrection life flows into it and nurtures it, especially through His Word and Sacraments. In the latter, Christ is manifest to the Faithful on earth, while His real and true Presence is in Heaven. He reigns over all from Heaven until He comes again. The Incarnation was not simply to reveal God more clearly than He had already been revealed in Creation and in the works of His Hands or in His acts in the History of Israel. The Incarnation was not to add to the revelation God had already given of Himself in His many Names and Titles declared in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Incarnation was not to reveal the personal characteristics and attributes already learned and experienced by innumerable Old Testament Saints, after all, they walked and talked with Him. They knew Him and had saving faith. Abraham was His Friend. They experienced both His Wrath and His Goodness. They knew of His love and compassion. They received His mercy. They had heard His Word, and His Law, through the Prophets for centuries. They new first hand His miracles and were blessed by His Redemption. They had learned He keep His promises. The Incarnation was not needed to reveal any or all of this. The Incarnation was first and foremost about the Salvation of God's Elect. It was to make possible the one, all-sufficient Atonement for the sins of the world. Jesus came to die. He was God Himself making the sacrifice of Himself to satisfy His own transgressed Law. The Incarnation was not about serving the poor, the sick or the marginalized, although Jesus did that while he was here- the same as God had done for centuries before the Incarnation. It was about Ransom. It was about the defeat of the Evil One, Satan. It was to secure the death of Death. The Ascension was to wrap up all this business. Christ reigns now to finally put away Death and Satan for good. They are destroyed, but refuse to admit defeat. They will.From all the above, the Doctrine of the Trinity was crafted centuries ago. God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit are One, sharing the same nature, character and attributes, but having different roles or functions (Latin: "persona"). That God is Triune, three "Persons" in One is the unique and most basic Doctrine of the Christian Faith. But we rightfully talk most about "God in Christ" because it is in Christ that we today first meet and are personally introduced to God. Through hearing and believing the Gospel about the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, we receive the eternal Life of God. We "come alive" to God and to Life "in Christ". We discover "God in Christ" and this becomes our witness to the world.References:I have pages of notes taken from reading the following books and others, which notes include dozens of Scripture passages. The Essay here is not an academic paper, but a sketch of my thoughts on the subject for my own benefit, as I try to organize my material. The process of writing it all out is helpful to me. I hope reading it will be interesting and helpful to you as well. Comments are welcome, if they are about what I have actually written. Thanks.Manual of Christian Doctrine, Louis BerkhofSystematic Theology, James O. BuswellChristian Theology, Millard EricksonSystematic Theology, Wayne GrudemChristian Theology, Alister McGrathGod the Almighty, Donald BloeschEvangelical Theology, Donald BloeschThe Living God, Thomas Oden

**Blog Export: DUTCH TREAT- Cal Fox's Blog, <http://www.calvinfox.com/blog/>**

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:25

Monday, September 1, 2008

## **ATTRIBUTES OF GOD (Part 1)**

Who is the God the Psalmist talks about? Whom does he seek, for whom does He thirst? You may assume you know or that every Christian will answer the question in the same way. Of course, we all know who God is! This is actually difficult to answer. God created our world and us. He is complete without us. He is totally other than us. So how can we describe Him? This is normally done by describing, or trying to describe, attributes about Him (and sometimes it is done by describing things which people believe God is not). The most common attribute, the one that is probably the most popular today is simply Love. If God is anything, many say, God is love. The very essence of God is Love. Love is what God is [literally] all about. This statement is emphatically not Biblical!

God reveals Himself in Scripture. The basic, essential nature of God revealed there is not Love! When Theologians describe God they actually talk about "attributes". These are aspects of who he is, His essential character or essence as God. Not every Theologian makes the exact same list of Attributes. They agree in general, and all agree on placing God's attributes into two categories: those which He shares in some degree with us human beings and those which He does not or can not share with us. Theologians do not agree as to which category a particular Attribute belongs. I am listing them here in an order that makes sense to me. The first group of attributes are known as "Communicable", because they are characteristics of God which He transmits or communicates to us. We are, after all, created by Him in His Image. The other group of attributes are not communicated to us. They are "Incommunicable", because, after all, we are limited created beings. (Some maintain that the difference between categories is a matter of degree.) God does not exist apart or behind His attributes. Nor do His attributes exist apart from Him. They were not added to God and they are not parts of God. They can not be separated out (except when we are trying to define and discuss each one). As we shall see, one aspect of God is His oneness or unity. He is One. In practice, God is always all that He is everywhere, at all times and in all places. This is why we can not say God is Love. Love is only one of many attributes of God. God is God and, among many other things, it is the nature or character of God to love. God loves, but it is not correct to say that the nature or essence of God is Love or is primarily Love. When we do that, we are ignoring, or even denying, all that God is. That, in effect is denying God. He is all or He is nothing. He can not be a "part" of Himself. One attribute of Him can not be all of Him. His character or nature or essence is one. He is not the sum of His attributes; He is essentially, equally, all His attributes together. Incommunicable Attributes (brief definitions)1. Self-existence, Independence- God does not need us or anything else in creation for Him to be God. God needs only Himself to be God. Being God is a given. Nothing existed before Him. He is uncaused. God is totally Other, totally Unique- there is none like Him. This is the first meaning of Holy.2. Spirituality- God exists as a being not made of any matter. He is a spirit, a non-corporeal Being. He has Life. He is the source of Life. He can not be perceived by any of our physical senses. Human beings are not spirits, but, in creating us, God endowed all humans with spirituality. (We are a unity of body and soul. Our soul has the need and ability to commune and communicate with God. That need and ability is our spirituality. We do not have a non-corporeal spirit living within our bodies, to be released at death.) 2. Invisibility- This is related to God's spirituality. God can not be seen by human eyes, although He makes something of Himself visible on occasion through visible things (known as theophanies, such as the burning bush or some angelic appearances). 3. Personality- God is a personal being. A "person" is defined as a being capable of self-consciousness and self-determination. The latter includes free-will. God has revealed himself in nature and in the Bible as a Being who speaks and acts within time. He is causally related to specific events in the world. He is revealed to be a Person distinguished by Rationality, Creativity, Morality and Communality (a Trinity).3. Unchangeableness- God is unchanging in His being, nature or character, as well as in His purposes. The technical word for unchangeable is "immutable". God is immutable, but God is not "impassible", i.e.- God is not without emotions or feelings. He is capable of both compassion and anger. (But, God is not a hot-head, flying off the handle, given to passion in the sense of being capable of irrational "crimes of passion", such as humans are. The latter is impossible given that God's nature and character and purposes are immutable!)3. Infinite- Everything about God is absolutely perfect. When Scripture tells us to think about all that is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy, we are to think of God. He is the standard or measure of all such things. This applies equally to all His attributes. They are all infinite, without quantification or qualification.4. Eternity- Infinity in relation to time is eternity. God has no beginning or end. He does not progress or develop. In Himself, He transcends time and He possesses His life complete and all at once. He created time and existed before there was Time. Therefore, we say God is timeless in Himself. But, God acts within time. He is not limited by it. He somehow is above Time and yet is involved in events as they occur in time, using them for His purposes. He knows tensed time. (See Omniscience) 4. Omnipresence- God is unlimited with respect to space, as well as Time, having created both. He has no spatial dimensions (He has no size. We can not properly say God is immense or big.) All that is God is present at every point everywhere at all times. 5. Unity- God is not and can not be

divided into parts. That is the original meaning of "Simple" and the Unity of God is sometimes known as His simplicity. As said, earlier, God is not a collection of individual attributes. Every attribute applies to His entire being. God is a completely integrated Person infinitely perfect in all His attributes. Communicable Attributes (brief descriptions)1. Omniscience- God fully knows Himself and all things actual and possible, past, present and future and this knowledge He has now, all at once. (See the attribute of Eternity.) His knowledge is complete and perfect, unchanging. He never learns or forgets anything. Our ability to know is predicated on God's prior knowledge. We can know because He does. That proves there is a reality which is knowable. Our education is in learning for ourselves what He knows about that reality. 2. Wisdom- God's wisdom, based on His knowledge and purposes, is His ability to choose the best goals and the best way to attain them. We are to seek His Wisdom for ourselves3. Truthfulness- All that God is defines reality and what is true. All of God's knowledge is true, without error. His words (revelation) expressing His knowledge is therefore also true. God can not lie or contradict Himself. The standard or measure of truth is conformity with the character, knowledge and words of God. God gives us the desire and the ability to receive, love and live by Truth. His Truth is the sure foundation for our world view and our lives.4. Goodness- Likewise, what God is defines what good is. "Good" is everything that is in harmony with the character and works of God. (cf. Perfection) Particularly, God's goodness refers to His Love and that includes the Grace, Mercy and Patience or Long-suffering He has for us. 5. Holiness- The second meaning of Holy is ethical. God has unique standards of ethical behavior and morals for Himself and for human beings. We are to be holy as He is holy. We are to love His Law, His Norms for how we are to live. We are to hate transgressions of His Law and separate ourselves from behavior that does not conform to His Norms.6. Righteousness- God is a God of Justice. He governs the world by His Law and holds it accountable to live accordingly. His Justice rewards those who do and it condemns those who do not. 7. Sovereignty- God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. He has his secret will and His revealed will for all things and all peoples. Though it is resisted, that resistance will fail and God's will shall be obeyed. This is because God is also sovereign in power. He is omnipotent, King of Kings, Lord of Lords. But His power is not exercised ruthlessly or arbitrarily. God's power is in the service of God's character and of all the attributes we have listed here. Summary God is a non-corporeal spirit Being, a Person who is self-sufficient, complete, unchangeable, infinite, eternal, omnipresent, and simple. He is omniscient, wise, truthful and good. His goodness is Love and that includes grace, mercy and patience toward us. God is also holy and righteous, decreeing and upholding the highest standards of morality and justice. And God is sovereign in His will and purposes, as well as in His power. All of this together describes the essential nature of God and begins to answer our question of who God is! This is the God with whom we have to do, the God we worship and serve. To Him be the Glory now and always.

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