

## Infinite God

Psalm 139:1-10

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 4, asks:

*What is God?*

And the famous answer is: God is a Spirit, *infinite*, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

Now, to shorten and clarify this for our purposes this morning we could say: God is infinite in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Thus, God's infinity is what we might call a meta-attribute. That is, it is an attribute which qualifies all other attributes. God is infinite in his being, infinite in his wisdom, infinite in his holiness, infinite in his justice, infinite in his goodness, infinite in his truth. All that God is, he is infinitely. Here's a more concrete, poetic description of God's infinity from Psalm 36:

*Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep.*

God's love, his faithfulness, his righteousness, his judgments, they are all vast, beyond our grasp, exceeding our feeble limitations. So again, here, we are before a staggering, and humbling mystery. As Stephen Charnock, who I've already mentioned in this series, a seventeenth century Puritan, author of the immense treatise entitled the existence and attributes of God – Charnock says this of God's infinity:

Whatever God is, he is infinitely so. Conceive of him as excellent, without any imperfection; a Spirit without parts; great without quantity; perfect without quality; everywhere without place; powerful without members; understanding without ignorance; wise without reasoning; light without darkness; infinitely excelling the beauty of all creatures...

And when you have risen to the highest, conceive him yet infinitely above all you can conceive, and acknowledge the infirmity of your own minds. And whatsoever conception comes into your minds, say, "this is not God; God is more than this."

We shall try and grasp just the outskirts of this infinity this morning. And we will make three points. Infinity, Immensity, and Immanuel.

## I. Infinity

First, then, infinity. So God is, according to our Confession, infinite in being and perfection. And by infinite we mean: no boundaries, no limits, no spatial constraints (negative theology). It is a corollary of God's being a spirit, without a body (overlap with that sermon, nature of the case, the attributes overlap, indeed they are one). Anybody with a body, exists somewhere. We live profoundly limited, local, existences – as creatures that are located in space and located in only one place at a time. We creep about from place to place. But God is not bound by space. It does not restrict or confine him. There is nothing local about his deity – and this separates him from all locatable, tangible, pagan gods.

Think of Solomon in our first lesson this morning. He has – according to the divine command – built God this most magnificent house. The monumental, lavish, exquisite, ornate, expensive temple. It's a moment of great national pride and celebration. The height of godly covenantal cultural achievement. Done, literally at Divine direction and with divine blessing. And in the midst of his prayer of dedication --- its as if he realizes the futility, the impotence of the whole thing, and he says – somewhat unexpectedly in this context:

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!” Quite a thing to pray at a temple dedication ceremony!

It is echoed later by Paul in Acts 17 where he says: The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything. How inconsequential all our Christian monuments, our grand cathedrals, our buildings all dedicated to the glory of God. How overinflated our impressions of these things are. We are used to drooling over them as extraordinary accomplishments. Cultural and artistic things like this are large in our eyes, because we are not staggered by the infinity of God. If we were, we'd realize what little, little, little things we and our works are. Puny little puffs of smoke acting as if the fate of the kingdom hangs on our labors.

Now, unlike our architectural work, Solomon's temple, IS actually going to house the name and the Shekinah glory of God in it. God will, in a sense, dwell in this one temple. (Nothing we've ever built will have this dignity). But Solomon still knows that even this building is superfluous, that it won't capture or limit or contain the infinite God. Heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! The greatest cathedrals in the world – for all their beauty -- are but broken, opaque, dim pointers to the infinite God. Like

we learned about Notre Dame they are vulnerable and transient. Crumbling structures in crumbling time.

The attribute of infinity must chasten us, and cleanse from our disordered love of finite things. We are constantly seeing small things as if they were big, and the infinite God as if he were finite. Here's God's own take on the temple, and thus our building projects, from Isaiah 66: Thus says the Lord:

"Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?"

All of the builders, he says, have not really come to terms with my infinity, with my relation to space.

We can refine this further. Infinity here is not like the mathematical concept of infinity where you keep adding and adding. God is not ongoing space. You can't start with categories of this creation --- stretch them out--- and approach God's infinity. Infinity means God transcends space. He does not take up space. He is non-spatial or a-spatial. But non-spatial does not mean God is not near. Quite the opposite. The infinite God who transcends space, who cannot be captured or imprisoned in space, is thus free to BE everywhere (only such a God is so free). God then, is above space, and without space, and yet in all spaces. (Repeat).

## **II. Immensity**

This brings us to the second point, immensity. I am using immensity as a synonym for omnipresence. A word which means present everywhere, or present in all places. The non-spatial God is ubiquitous --- that is, present everywhere.

Note the logic here. Infinity implies immensity. It is just because God transcends space that he can be omnipresent. Again: he who is above space, and without space, is yet, in all spaces. The immense, vast, omnipresent God fills the cosmos, then, with his presence. Here's the prophet Jeremiah:

"Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far away? <sup>24</sup> Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord."

God is at hand; he is far away. He fills heaven and earth. Of course the classic text for this omnipresence is our second lesson, Psalm 139.

*Where shall I go from your Spirit?  
Or where shall I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!  
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!*

*If I take the wings of the morning  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me.*

Up to heaven, or down to Sheol, if he takes the wings of the morning --- referring to the sunrise in the east, or if he dwells in the uttermost parts of the sea – the Mediterranean, which is west of the promised land. Up, down, east, west --- the presence of God cannot be escaped. No escape, and for the Psalmist, this is a delight. No escape. No regrets.

Let's unpack this presence a bit further. Because God is not present the way we are present. The key thing to grasp here, if we are to avoid cognitive idolatry — that is either making God in our image or just a much bigger, better version of us — to avoid this, we first must affirm that God is wholly present everywhere. That's *wholly* not holy. Wholly – meaning fully and completely. God is not partly here and partly there. He is not spread out like light or like air or like a gas.

He is present in the fulness of his divine being at every point in the universe. Inside things, outside things, around things – at subatomic levels and macro levels --- everywhere. Augustine gets at this by saying: God is an infinite circle whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere. This is truly astonishing stuff. God is in a real way – nowhere – because he is not contained or captured or located in space. Yet he is fully, wholly, not partially, present everywhere. The center of the circle is everywhere, the circumference is nowhere.

Nor does God displace other bodies. When we are somewhere that means other things cannot be in that exact spot – we displace things. We jump in the pool we displace the water. God is everywhere in the pool --- and the water is unaffected. God is more inward, nearer to us than we are to ourselves, and yet we are not displaced by his presence. God is present such that he gives all things being, he upholds all things, his presence and his power work with and through our presence and our powers, in a non-competitive way. In him, Acts 17 says, we live and move and have our being.

And yet for all his intimate nearness, there is no mixture of God and creatures. No blurring of the distinction between the creator and us creatures. God's omnipresence does not imply or lead to pantheism – the idea that all things ARE God. God is in all things, but all things are not God. The mystery of God's omnipresence is that there is no distance, no space between God and creatures, and, at the same time, no mixing of God and creatures.

Finally, on this point, we should state that, though God is present everywhere, and wholly present, he is not everywhere in the same way. The Bible speaks, for example, of his being uniquely present, in majesty and glory, in heaven. But of course, he is not imprisoned in heaven, his essence is not confined there, but he is – as he was in the holy of holies – uniquely present there. Present in a special way. The Bible can speak of God being far off or being near. But this does not mean his location has somehow moved. This type of language is often in reference to our moral relation to God. Not his measured distance from us. He is near to the humble, he is far from the proud. We draw near to him; thus he draws near to us, but none of this has to do with actual spatial distance. He may manifest, or show the effects of, his presence differently, depending on the situation, but he is always wholly present in the fulness of his essence everywhere.

Here's Charnock again: God is in heaven in regard to the manifestation of his glory; in hell by the expression of his justice; in earth by the discoveries of his wisdom, power, patience and compassion. In his people as monuments of his grace. And in all as regards his essence. Notice again: his presence with his people is not the same as his presence in all – but in all cases he is wholly present.

### **III. Immanuel**

This brings us to our final point, Immanuel. The infinite, omnipresent God who was with his people, throughout the OT, in the fulness of time, comes among us. The infinite God dwells bodily in the incarnate Christ. In him, the fulness of deity dwells in bodily form, Paul says. Through a finite human nature we are given access to the infinite One. We heard this in the gospel lesson. “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”(which means, God with us).

Now God is with us, not by his invisible omnipresence and power, but in the flesh, in all its weakness and vulnerability. The One who is non-spatial, above and beyond space, now becomes visible and takes up space, just as we do. Infinity, if you will, is placed in our grasp.

Now what I want us to see here is WHO this incarnate Christ is. Who is the person who has taken on flesh? He is Immanuel, GOD with us. He is God. More precisely, he is the second person of the Trinity. God, the eternal Son of the Father. Do you know what that means? The person of Jesus, being divine, is infinite. The human nature is not infinite, but the person bearing the human nature is infinite. And because it is the INFINITE GOD who is incarnate for us, we, who have offended the infinite God, can be saved. The infinite value of Christ's atonement is rooted in the fact that the person making the atonement is infinite.

The infinity of God should illumine for us the infinite value of Christ's atonement. Here's another 17<sup>th</sup> c English theologian, Matthew Mead:

Alas! It is an infinite righteousness that must satisfy for our sins, for it is an infinite God that is offended by us. If ever you sin be pardoned, it is infinite mercy that must pardon it; if ever you be reconciled to God, it is infinite merit that must do it; if ever your hear be changed and your soul renewed, it is infinite power that must affect it; And if ever your soul escape hell and be saved at last, it is infinite grace that must save it. Because the incarnate One is the infinite God, his work has infinite worth. And we are saved then by infinity incarnate.

And now, that same infinite Son, exalted on high, manifests his universal presence, his love and care for the church, through the gift of the Spirit. Through the infinite Spirit, he who was present in the flesh, remains present invisibility--with us to the end of the age. Not only omnipresent, but savingly, mercifully present. Now he dwells in us redemptively, to comfort, to pardon, to cleanse, to teach, to guide. To cultivate intimate communion with us. Making us temples of the Holy Spirit, dwelling places for the fulness of God, fitting our hearts to be houses of the holy Trinity. He who is God with us, is now with us to the end of the age. Present in this mode of faith, until the current heavens and earth give way to the new creation, and, as John puts it in Revelation:

"The dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. And they shall see his face."

It is for this, for infinite, unending communion with the infinite God, it is for this, that we were redeemed at infinite price, by the infinite person of the Son. Such is the sweetness of the infinity of God. It means we are never beyond the reach of his presence. And it means that while we wait for that great day, we will fear no evil: Why? for he is wholly, completely, WITH US. Amen.

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