

God is Spirit, Infinite and Eternal

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[0 : 00] So, we're starting by looking at the character of God for a few weeks, and of course that's impossible to cover everything.

Well, it always would be. We would never be able to cover everything, and you'll be disappointed maybe some things when we miss out. There's one or two... We're only doing it for a few weeks, so... Because we're going to do lots of other things as well.

But we're going to look at the nature of God, and tonight I'm going to look at God as a spirit, or God as spirit, infinite and eternal. Okay?

So, those of you who were at Citigroup last week, and hats off and thanks for everyone who responded back on behalf of their Citigroup with some of the characteristics of God.

So I'll just rattle through some of the lists that we got. It's not exhaustive, but this is what some of you put that. Transcendent, it's got with us, provider, life-giver, master, self-existing, creator, almighty, truth, judge, king of kings, eternal, personal, gracious, covenantal, comforter, loyal, simple, omnipotent, omnipresent, co-eternal, immutable, enduring, long-suffering.

[1 : 18] So you've got theological terms there, and you also just got descriptive terms of who God is. And it's great. We could have multiplied that many times over.

But what I want to say by way of introduction is God, and this is important, that God is a mystery. And we need to remember that preachers, theologians, teachers, Christians can never get to the point where they say, yeah, I know, I've got a fair idea of everything about God, because He is a mystery.

Remember this, if He's small enough to be understood, He's not big enough to worship. It's a good point, because we spend a lot of our times, a lot of our lives, I think, questioning God.

Why hasn't He done this, or why hasn't He revealed this, or why is He acting in this way? But remember, if He's small enough to be understood, if you can say, I know Him and understand Him perfectly, then He's not big enough to worship.

So words will fail us. And I want to start by reading a duxology from Romans chapter 11, and you'll maybe look at this again at the city group Romans chapter 11 and verse 33, just to the end, these great words which remind us of the mystery of who God is.

[2 : 41] Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments, how inscrutable His ways. For who is known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?

Who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever I'm in. That would be good to memorize that and to take it with you, particularly when you're questioning God.

And when you think God doesn't love you anymore, or isn't caring about you, or is silent, you go back to recognize the inscrutable nature in many ways of who God is.

Now one thing we're not going to look at is the trinity, you think, well, but that's harsh. You know, it's one of the... It's the fundamental reality of God in many ways.

And I think that's true. And maybe because of that, it's something we study and know about a little bit more. But that whole idea of trinity, isn't it, which is not a biblical word, but it's a biblical truth, a God, the Father, God, the Son, God, the Holy Spirit, three persons.

[3 : 50] And one God is almost the most basic recognition of mystery that we have in God.

He's that God who is never lonely and never a nice little bit, but He is a mysterious God who is infinite in His glories.

Now there's things that we don't share with God, which theologians call His incommunicable attributes. And there's things we do share with God, which are called His communicable attributes, things that we share like joy and wisdom and knowledge.

But there's other things that we don't share. And I'm going to look at this evening some of the things we don't share. But what I don't want this series to become, I don't want it to become esoteric, and I don't want it to become theologically speculative, which sometimes can happen when we drift into looking at themes in the Bible apart sometimes, maybe from their context.

So I don't want that to happen. But do feel free to ask questions. So God is Spirit, infinite, eternal. So I'm going to look brief. This is very brief. Obviously, God is Spirit.

[5 : 04] 1, 4, verse 24, which is obviously where we find this passage where Jesus is speaking to the woman from Samaria.

And in verse 20, they're talking about worship. And verse 24, or verse 23, the hour is coming. Jesus said, Now is here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him.

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth. Go away and think about that amazing truth and who He told it to, and consider it a little bit more, and why He did so to someone like that.

But this great truth is that God is Spirit. In other words, God is not material. God is not physical. God doesn't have flesh and blood.

In His essence, He is a spiritual being. Now that links Him to the next two characteristics that He's infinite and eternal, and I'll come back to them.

[6 : 08] We'll just look at them briefly as well. But one Timothy, one says, This is this great doxology to the King, eternal, immortal and invisible.

The only God be honor and glory forever and ever amen. So there's this invisibility about God who is Spirit. Now we've talked about that when we've looked at the Holy Spirit, and God is Spirit.

The word there is the word for breath or the word for wind. And I think that is the description that is most helpful for us in describing who God is, God being a Spirit.

I think it's the nearest correspondence in words that we can get to the character and nature of God not being a physical entity, flesh and blood entity.

And it's this correspondence to wind with its uncontainableness, its mystery, its invisibility, its power, all reflecting this sense of God being Spirit.

[7 : 19] We sense Him. You know, you can sense that wind. You sense it, but you can't see it. You can't touch it really, but you sense it.

And that reality of God as Spirit, Romans 1 tells us is something that every human being has, even the most ardent atheist suppresses that wind.

That sounds terrible. But it suppresses that sense of God's presence, that sense of God's reality that is indefinable, but nonetheless very real.

And breath, the whole concept of God as breath, also God as Spirit, I think focuses again on the character of God denoting and speaking of Him being life when we see, you know, the indication that someone has died is there's no more breath.

There's no more breathing, life and light and it's synonymous with breath and also communication. The breath, what I'm saying comes because I breathe and speak it out and of course Jesus is referred to as the word.

[8 : 35] And so there's these elements to God being Spirit, which is that He is powerful and communicative and this reality of not being material as a person, as a living being.

But we do know that He makes Himself visible, don't we, different parts of the Bible? Can you think of some ways in which we find God as visible in the Bible?

Burning bush, yeah, so He comes as a bush or He speaks through it. Anything else that you make, well, God isn't just Spirit or language that the Bible uses about God.

Of wrestles, yeah, it's a being, physical being. Well, when you think of lots of references in the Bible that for God, what's happening is God's accommodating to us when He's describing Himself using human language when He appears in a theophany, as it's described, making Himself condescending to us, to our finiteness, to our lack of ability to understand who God is or to understand His actions.

So it speaks about God's hands or God's feet or God's eyes or the one who comes alongside us or who cares and loves and grieves and laughs and rejoices and hates and who changes His mind.

[10 : 24] Lots of language in the Bible that apparently seem to contradict this fact that He's Spirit, but it's simply God condescending to us, accommodating our inability to know Him, but doing so in such a way that we can grasp more about His character.

And of course, He makes Himself visible not just in that accommodating way, but also obviously in the person of Jesus. So God reveals Himself in the person of Jesus, God who is Spirit, in the person of Jesus, the Son, Colossians 1.15, the Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, astonishing reality.

Two natures, one person, this word, this breath, this power of God contained as it were, revealed in the person of Jesus.

Okay. As God is Spirit, and it's very important that we recognize that God is Spirit, and we'll think a little bit more just as we close it in a minute with the infinite and the eternal bit.

But it's important that we recognize God is Spirit because it's the Spirit of God who dwells in us as Christians. If God was physical, He'd be bound, and He wouldn't be able to dwell in the believers that there are in all generations and in all ages and all parts of the world.

[11 : 59] This is great verse in John 20, verse 22, where Jesus said, and He speaks to the disciples, and with that He breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit.

So we recognize that God is Spirit, is an infinite Spirit, because it's the only way that God the Son can dwell in our hearts.

It's the only way that we can be brought alive, that we can be empowered, that we can recognize and know and be connected with God.

Ephesians 3, 16, I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

So God being Spirit enables Him to live in His people. And that is the only way we can worship Him. He spoke to the women of Samaria when he said, this is the context, isn't it?

[13 : 00] That he says only those who worship in Spirit and truth are those who worship in a way that is pleasing to God.

Yes? No, no. Although it does involve an attitude, but it's speaking of the only ability we have to worship is when we're empowered and enlivened by God's Spirit, so to do.

We need His Spirit, and that Spirit which indwells us and which reveals truth to us. So it's not so much an attitude in this context, it's much more this recognition that the living God dwells in His people by faith.

And the reason I think that's important, well, obviously it's important and it's significant, but I think practically is because Jesus in our lives is an invisible reality, because God is invisible and the Spirit comes into our lives.

And by that, what I mean by that is, He can't be seen or verified empirically and materially in our life.

[14 : 26] You know, we believe by faith, and the Spirit of God in us, you know, I don't maybe you don't think this, but I often think, the Spirit of God is in me.

Surely that's something that is dramatically visible in and of itself. But the reality is, it's entirely unique God dwelling in us.

There's no blood type, there's no passport, there's no birth certificate that we can give to people to say, I'm a Christian. There's nothing that makes us different from anyone else around us that, you know, immediately would say, or a test that could be taken that says, I'm a Christian, anything material or anything like that.

God is invisible living in us. However, the evidence is a changed heart. It's a changed heart in life as the truth transforms us and makes us more like Jesus.

It is a life that's changing that provides the evidence for God in our lives and testifies the Spirit who testifies to the truth in us, then testifies to those around us.

[15 : 40] So it's frustrating sometimes, isn't it? We wish we sensed more of God's power or that He was more tangible or that He would prove Himself or show Himself and yet in His invisibility, His Spirit dwells in us, enables us to worship and enables us to have transformed hearts.

And I think that's important, very important. So God is Spirit. I just want to say a couple of things about the other two aspects. He's infinite and He's eternal.

Now, can anyone tell me what they think is the difference between infinite and eternal?

Yeah, well, there's a lot.

As you know, I'm not an academic theologian and I've always struggled with distinction and in studying this, I think I still struggle with it at some level.

[17 : 10] But I think the infinitude of God speaks about the numberlessness of God that we are finite and He is infinite at that level.

So, the infinite isn't really used in the Bible, the Word itself. There's concepts that speak about it. And in fact, Psalm 147 where we sung, not in the metrical version actually that we sung, didn't say it quite, but in the Old Testament, Psalm 147 and verse 5 says, The great is the Lord, abundant in power, His understanding is beyond measure.

And the authorized version is translated, infinite, His understanding is infinite. And there's an infiniteness to the character and the nature of God.

There's no limit, in other words, to His perfections, to His being. He's infinitely light. We looked at God as light the other day in church.

There's no darkness in Him at all. That means that light just never stops. It's infinite. There's no darkness in Him. So whatever attribute you looked at about God, He is infinitely that.

[18 : 37] It's immeasurable. There's no beginning and end to it, and His wisdom, His grace, and His power, and His loving, it can't be measured.

It's infinite. That's probably the greatest struggle we have with the reality of God, that He's not material, that He's not bound, that He's not got borders, that He is infinite.

Which means He can't improve. He can't mature. He can't get better or worse, because He's infinite in His perfections, infinite in His glory.

And I'm struggling with words to explain that, because I'm finite. And I'm certainly struggling to understand it, because I'm finite.

And it takes me back to the beginning, to the mystery of the character and nature of God as He reveals Himself to us. You know, I can't, I occasionally read these things, or you see them and tell them, it talks about the size of the universe, the observable universe, the material world, the finite world in which we live, a radius of 96 billion light years.

[19 : 48] But we just can't grasp that kind of measurements, the universe that we're part of. And yet God is infinitely greater and more glorious than that.

He's infinite. Yet, God the Son took a human body and bound Himself, born naked from the womb and helpless, became measurable, grew, was limited, died on a cross.

And of course we see in His glory rose again the third day. But it is astonishing that the infinite God, in God the Son, acts in this incomprehensible way of sacrifice and of emptying in order to do something for you and me here in our lives, and that sacrifice therefore must be infinitely and exclusively suitable because it comes from this infinitely perfect, good, wise, just, holy God.

So there's great comfort in that. And I think it's a reminder to, I hope it's a reminder to us this evening, that in His infinitude He's not going to run out of patience with you.

It's not limited. He's not going to run out of forgiveness. Well, that's one sin too many. It's not like that. We mustn't compare Him with ourselves at that level.

[21 : 36] We must simply accept the infinitude of the character of God. There's no sins that are too great and too deep for Him in His infinite mercy to forgive other than that sin that He speaks of because it is never repented of that sin of the Holy Spirit.

And therefore, I don't know if you've ever, I don't know how good it is to think too much about heaven.

But if you think about the fact that we're going as good and the fact that Christ will be there as great and that we'll know God is amazing. But I think it's really hard to understand that without thinking it's going to get boring at some level that we'll end up knowing all that we can.

But isn't the great thing that knowing God in eternity can never become boring because we are finite beings, even in eternity, that will always as created beings be learning more about the uncreated God, will always be mystery and knowledge to receive about God.

It does begin to blow my mind, so I'm not staying there. So God is Spirit is infinite and then briefly also eternal. John Timothy 1, 17, this is great doxology, you know, to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, which covers all the aspects of what we've been looking at in a sense.

[23 : 13] And they all do overlap. The only God be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. So the infinitude kind of refers, I think, to the boundlessness of His character.

The fact that He's eternal speaks of the fact that He Himself has no beginning and no end in relation to time particularly.

No beginning, no end, there's no succession of moments for God. He's uncreated, so He sees all things at one time, everything.

I don't know how you can describe that in human terms. Kind of, I suppose it's the bird's eye view idea, isn't it?

When you're on the ground, you can only see certain things in certain ways, but if you're up in the air, you've got a bird's eye view, you can see everything. No, that's a very poor example, a very poor man's example of the eternal nature of God.

[24 : 19] Isaiah 46, 9 and 10 quotes a verse that we often use when we speak of God. It says, Remember the former things of old, for I am God and there is none else.

I am God and there is none like me declaring the end from the beginning. And from ancient things, the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, I will do all my pleasure.

And I was a young student minister, I was preaching up in the Highlands somewhere. And I said, just in my sermon, God knows the beginning from the end and carried on preaching.

And an old man came up to me and the way out of church, he said, God knows the end from the beginning, not the other way round. And it, oh, stuck with me that I had quoted the Bible wrong.

It's quite an interesting reality. He knows the end from the beginning and that's helpful for us in our lives to recognize that He is this eternal present.

[25 : 26] So you don't know what will happen to you tomorrow. You do know what's happened to you in the past, but you don't know what will happen tomorrow. But God sees all our lives from the day we were born to the day we died.

And indeed the whole of the cosmos and the work of the cosmos is all before Him, all at once as it were, because of His character, an eternal present.

The Yahweh name of God, the great I am, the great ever present, the one who is always there knowing.

And that does have implications, a lot of implications for us all. Like, He's never going to be surprised by anything, never. He's never learning new things, oh, I'm surprised at that.

He's never going to be like that for the living God. He's never going to understand us better. We don't need to reveal ourselves to Him at that level so that He knows us better.

[26 : 21] He sees it all. He sees all of life. He sees all of heaven. He sees all of hell. And He will always, because He's eternal, nothing extends beyond Him.

And that, for me, that's what I struggle because it blends into infinity. But practically these truths are important and His eternity and the fact that He knows our lives is a huge comfort.

So comfort of committing our future to God when we don't know it, not in some kind of robotic way that there's nothing we can do or a fatalistic way, because we know, even in the mystery of that truth, that He is made as responsible and those who take decisions and make decisions.

But we're asked to do it in the knowledge of His knowledge and His sovereign Lordship and His promises. And in trust ourselves. It's a great comfort and trust ourselves to Him and the promises He's made for us are yes and amen and can't be broken when we hold on to His hand.

And that is because Christ entered time so that we might have eternal life.

[27 : 48] So that this great eternal God entered into time so that we might have eternal life. Now our eternal life is different from God's eternal character, because God's eternity doesn't have a beginning or an end.

Our eternity had a beginning, had a creation, but it will not have an end. And in Christ we know eternal life.

It's impossible to conceive of non-existence. Can I say that? Impossible. Impossible to... It's impossible for you to try and imagine you not existing.

And that is because it will never happen. You've been born, you always exist, you will always have consciousness. And the great comfort of that in Christ is its eternal life and His glorious presence, perfection.

The terror of it is the presence of the eternal God in judgment, in hell. Hell is an eternity of not coming to know the unsearchable love and the unsearchable riches of Christ, an unsearchably deep and dark reality of non-enjoyment.

[29 : 12] And I'm not sure what time looks like in eternity, in heaven. Theologians think differently about it.

But I think one thing in heaven, time will seem to pass really quickly, because you know what it's like when you rejoin yourself. Time just flies.

But you know, when you're in church, you're struggling with the ceremony, wish the ceremony then it goes on for ages and it takes so long. Or you know, that's a trivial example, but if you're suffering, time, you can't sleep the night so long, time seems to take on a different dimension when you're on holidays, you know, all these things.

And I think there's a sense in which the eternity of these existences differ qualitatively in terms of time also and what that looks like.

But eternal life for us will be increasing joy and with no shadow of a final whistle. Because even in our best times of joy here, aren't we?

[30 : 22] There's always just a, even a thin line of shadow, well, it's going to end. It can't go on. And that's really hard, that's depressing.

But that is not what we enjoy, because Christ for us entered time so that we can have eternal life.

So I'm finished. It's important, I think, to consider these truths. It's good to meditate on them and think about them, but can I ask generally thinking in our lives not to separate them from their spiritual context, or should I say their scriptural context?

Don't systematize these truths in such a way that makes logic rather than revelation the driving force. Because I think sometimes it's possible to take the mysterious truths of God's revelation and try and finite them, try and make them logical and take them out of their, this simplicity of biblical revelation.

You know, this most profound of all truths God is, but Jesus is standing, sitting by a well, speaking to a woman who is shunned by her community because she's had so many husbands and is now living with a guy.

[31 : 47] And that's where theology goes. That's where we should take our theology, and that's where we should live it, and that's where we should work it out.

It's important to remember that God does accommodate in the Bible His character to our physical and mental limitations, to our finitude.

And I thank God for that, and I thank God that He speaks about Himself in ways that I can understand, as well as recognizing that there's great mystery in His character.

God is Spirit, infinite and eternal. Any questions? Don't ask me any theological questions about infinity or...

Has anyone struggled with any of these concepts? Not tonight or my expression of it, but in your lives. I think the difficult thing is, knowing God was within us, then the rest of us sinned.

[32 : 49] I know God's affected in our weakness, but it's frustrating when you're like, oh, well, I'm still... I know.

It's a divided heart of God being in our hearts, but still wrestling with sin. But the good thing is that it's because He's in our hearts that we're wrestling with sin. If He wasn't in our hearts, we would just be living our own way.

And what's good to know is to allow Him to keep... We'll wrestle till our last day with... Because the deeper the light goes, the more perversely He finds in our hearts.

So there's always that work of grace going on until our last day. But it is frustrating. And I think it's true because I think part of it, or we fail or give in or sin because we don't recognize the power that is available to us and we don't plug into that and we just maybe just shrug our shoulders.

I think, wow, it reminds us of how powerful sin is though, doesn't it? It reminds us how dark our hearts are if it takes the spirit of God to indwell us, to give us victory.

[34 : 02] I think a lot of the time we think sin, it's not such a big deal. But we are God image bearers.

It's an incredible reality to think who you are. To think what you can do as a person because you're made in God's image. Unbelievable.

You know, we think about computers and the amazing advancement of computers, what they can do. Nothing compared with you standing up and walking out that door today and shaking hands with someone and smiling.

That's a remarkable reality. Nothing else can be like that. And so sin is terrible too.

Sin, exactly. No, that's very true. And neither is the devil.

[34 : 55] That's very important. Always remember, it's not an equal battle between good and evil. The devil is a created, you know, a created spiritual being, fallen but created.

And he can't be in all places at one time like God. And he doesn't dwell in our hearts in that way. And that's important to remember, we're on the side of victory.

God is infinite and infinitely good. How many times in the last week have you questioned God's goodness?

I know I have. If I allow myself to do that because I'm not thinking of the implications of accusing God of not caring or not loving or not being honest or turning his back, it's because we have a small view of who he is.