

THE IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, INVINCIBLE GOD

1 Timothy 1:17

Dr. Robert Morris, April 27, 2011

“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:17)

In 1867 Walter Chalmers Smith, preacher, pastor, and poet from Scotland penned the words to one of the church’s great hymns, based on Paul’s doxology written to Timothy, his son in the faith:

*Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days;
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.*

*Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.*

*To all life thou givest in both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish but nought changeth Thee.*

*Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render: O help us to see
’Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee.*

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Introduction: The presence of God is not always as intriguing as His assumed absence. His voice may not seem as eloquent as His silence. So often the circumstances of our lives drive us to longing to hear just a word from God, or for some glimpse of His power, or the reassurance of His presence, only to have that painful sense of wondering where God is when we need Him. He seems to be absent for the moment. Distant! Preoccupied! Seemingly unconcerned! But later ... just a little later, we come to the life-changing knowledge that He was there all the time!

What is there about God who walks with us through the deepest valleys, climbs the highest mountains, comforts us in the hours of sorrow, strengthens us in the moments of challenge, protects us against the enemies of the soul, and lifts us across the divide into immortality?

Call them “attributes” if you will. Call them vital “characteristics” of His divine personhood if you desire. By whatever words you choose to identify them, there are certain distinctives about God that blend quantity with quality, and by which we can learn life-changing truth about Him.

Among the many set forth by Biblical theologians this message focuses on four of them. God maintains His unsearchable judgments, indicating that He has a sovereign mind. Also, God

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maintains His unfathomable ways, teaching us that what He does is always within His sovereign will. Further, God maintains undefeatable control, by which we know His sovereign power. Finally, God maintains His unquestionable presence, from which we gain the assurance that defeats any sense of loneliness or perhaps more accurately, any sense of “aloneness.”

1. The Unsearchable Judgments of God ... He has a sovereign mind.

It is the Apostle Paul in that magnificent treatise written to the Christians at Rome, and inspired and sustained by the Holy Spirit for all Christians until the return of Jesus. He wrote:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD?’ (Is. 40:13) ‘Or who has become His counselor?’” (Job 36:22)

And what are the answers to these questions?

No one! *“Who has known the mind of God?”* No one! *“Who has ever given Him counsel?”* No one! His mind and His judgments are unsearchable. It defies the mind of a person to find the depths of the sovereign mind of God. God told the Prophet Isaiah:

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways’ says the LORD. ‘For as the

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heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8, 9)

In Job’s response to one of his so-called “counselors,” he makes a startling statement:

“Can anyone teach God knowledge, since He judges those on high?” (Job 21:22)

One of the insightful academic exercises is to read the research or reflective papers of students in a college. Insights into the very character of the student flow easily from the language they use in writing. This is especially interesting when reading the work of a student unknown to the reader. A person may be able to plumb the depths of another’s mind, and thereby glean much related to that person’s character. But no one can plumb the mind of God. How unsearchable are His judgments ... His thoughts! Theologians have spent their lifetimes searching out the traits, the characteristics of God, the activities of God in Holy Scripture, only to come to the end of life humbly admitting they have barely scratched the surface. No wonder Paul wrote those magnificent words: *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:33)* And then asks the provocative question: *“For who has known the mind of the LORD?” (Romans 11:34)*

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And amid the seemingly hopeless scenario of trying to discover the mind of God, the glorious truth emerges: ***"We CAN know God!"*** If we come to Him with sheer reason we will discover ourselves kept at a distance, at a loss to understand His unsearchable thoughts! But the grand truth is, that if we come with a humble heart, acknowledging our *"humanlyness,"* we will discover that we can know Him deeply in our hearts, in the tender personal experience of life, even though He remains aloof from the curious eyes of sheer reason. To know God is reasonable, but not on the basis of sheer human reason. Our minds may be flawed in the frail limitations of our humanity, but the God of infinite knowledge so created us that we do have the capacity to know that He is and that He can be the personal God of our lives. The great truth of being able to know God rests solidly on the equally thrilling truth of:

2. The Unfathomable Ways of God ... He has a sovereign will.

We must make no mistake about it: God has a sovereign will, although His ways are often beyond our human comprehension. Try as we may, we cannot unravel the tapestry of His plans ... not fully! Not as long as we are earthbound. Yet, He has disclosed all He wants us to know about His sovereign will and plan. The Apostle Paul wrote clearly:

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"His ways (are) past finding out!" (Romans 11:33c)

What God has done and what God continues to do escape the ability of our human minds to fully understand. To the Old Testament people who tried to grasp the depths of God's person, God Himself asked the rhetorical questions:

"To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?" (Isaiah 40:18)

"To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?" (Isaiah 40:25) The answer is, of course, ***"No one!"***

After God sets before Isaiah a very impressive litany of *"His ways,"* in reference to creation and His sovereign knowledge, He does not close His monologue with the prophet without one of the most soul-lifting, life-transforming promises ever given to human beings:

"But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint!" (Isaiah 40:31)

It is out of that sovereign will of God that is unfathomable in all its dimensions, the truth emerges: God has provided for all human creatures the splendid opportunity to enter into a relationship with Him in which they can rise above the tragedies of life's sorrows, master the challenges of life's demands, and endure the

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heaviness of life's routine. The secret lies in God's first words to Isaiah in this context: *"Those who wait on the LORD..."*

Other translations help us see this more clearly:

"Those who hope in the LORD..." (TNIV) or *"Those who trust in the LORD..."* (HCSB) The eternally true key here is that within the sovereign mind of God there lies the sovereign will of God, providing for us as we live in the limitations of our earthbound lives.

It is God's sovereign will that when embraced in our lives gives to us the renewing strength to **soar high, surge ahead, and slog on!**

This splendid prospect lying ahead of every child of God is based solidly on:

3. The Undefeatable Control of God ... He has a sovereign power!

It is amazing that human beings, living within the arena of their own human limitations, attempt to be greater in strength than God. How easily do such words flow from our lips: *"Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise."* Yes! ***"Almighty ... victorious!"***

Build your tower toward heaven, all you citizens of Babel! Claim your place on the mighty statue of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay, you subjects

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of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon! Let the LORD God of Israel show you who is in control.

Listen to your so-called **King** Nebuchadnezzar as he glories in his achievements, his conquests and his power:

"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30)

The sacred record continues:

"While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling place shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.' That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws."

(Daniel 4:31-33)

Now, let an earthly king, one whose life was characterized by ungodliness, guide our hearts and minds to the truth of God's sovereign power:

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“And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Daniel 4:34-35)

God does not put on the ermine and crimson robes of royalty, ride in gold chariots drawn by white horses bedecked in bright plumage, or walk on crimson carpets while others bow as He passes by. But be assured! The Immortal, Invisible God is forever Invincible! Let no one ever doubt His sovereign power.

In the eloquent silence, and in the intrigue of what seems to be His invisibility, be assured that He is there! Here then, is

4. The Unquestionable Reality of God ... He has a sovereign presence!

Many years ago, during the time of World War II there was a lot of comic scribbling or graffiti that began to appear on walls and rocks everywhere proclaiming, *“Kilroy was here!”* History affirms that this slogan was used in many countries of

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the world. Walls in Germany, buildings in Tokyo, rocks in Arizona, on the gray granite of mountain sides! Everywhere, seemingly, *“Kilroy was there.”*

Make no mistake! God is NOT like Kilroy! He does not write His name on the walls and buildings of the world! Yet, the reality of God’s sovereign presence is everywhere. He is there, every day, every hour, every tick of the clock of life ... He is there! Always ... His unsearchable mind is working in concert with His unfathomable will, carrying the whole universe along by and under His undefeatable power.

In the darkest hours of earth’s heart-wrenching sorrows, He may be silent, but the eloquence of His invisible presence speaks the calm assurance that all is well.

Come to the Garden of Eden where tucked away behind some bushes are Adam and Eve, broken by their disobedience. *“Adam, Adam ... where are you?”* echoes the voice through the green flower-bedecked shrubs. *“Over here, Lord.”* *“Why are you hiding, Adam?”* *“I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”* No longer could God walk in the garden with Adam and Eve. *“Here, Adam, take this blood-smeared skin of a lamb; those fig leaves are unacceptable to Me.”*

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Symbolic of that bruised, broken body of the Lamb of God! Yes! God looked into the tomorrows when the blood of the Lamb of God would drip into a pool at the foot of a cross! Yes! *“Yes, Adam ... I am here and I am extending grace to you in this terrifying hour of your guilt.”*

Often people call this the *“providence of God.”* But do we know what *“providence”* means? It is from the Latin *providentia*. It is a compound word, with the prefixed preposition *“pro”* meaning *“before”* or *“ahead of time.”* The last part of the word, *“videntia”* is from the verb *“videre,”* meaning *“to see.”* We get our English word *“video”* from that verb. Putting the word together then, we have *“seeing ahead of time.”* We are usually quite good at history, but not very good at prophecy, or seeing things ahead of time. But God sees ahead of time, and in the Garden of Eden He looked forward in time to that powerful moment when in the eloquence of His own silence He watched as His eternal, uncreated, one-of-a-kind, uniquely born Son poured out His life-blood to provide atonement for the sins of all who would place their trust in and reliance on Him. That is the unquestionable reality of God ... His sovereign presence ... that now He might walk with us in the gardens of our lives.

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Conclusion: We may have no clue as to what will happen in our future ... one minute from now ... one hour ... one day ... one week ... one year! But the Immortal, Invisible, Invincible God knows ... in His *providentia* ... and always He is continually, constantly, and confidently working in our behalf. Yes! His unsearchable mind is working in concert with His unfathomable will, carrying the whole universe along by and under His undefeatable power. With relentless determination He is pursuing His purpose in our individual and collective lives. At times He blesses us and we thank Him. At other times He tests us and we squirm just a little.

We may weep, or grieve, or cry, or shake our heads, or laugh, or smile, or shout. In the midst of it all, our God NEVER changes. There are lines in Walter Charles Smith’s hymn that thrill us:

*We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish but nought changeth Thee.*

Of course nothing changes God. He is GOD! He is not fickle. He is not moody. He will never be frustrated. He doesn’t sit for an interview or a portrait. Here is reality! God is here! Yes! He **IS** the **IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, INVINCIBLE GOD!**

*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to
God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever
and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17)*