THE GREATNESS OF GOD
“mighty Lord”

Key question
In what sense is God “all powerful”?

Key text
Psalm 139:7-10

“How can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Thy hand will lead me, And Thy right hand will lay hold of me.”

Introduction

1. Four big questions.
   a. How is God related to nature?
      • Is He transcendent - incompatible with the natural world?
      • Is He immanent - intimately involved with the natural world?
   b. How is God related to time?
      • Is He unchangeable?
      • Is He in process?
   c. How is God related to humanity?
      • Is He personal?
      • Is He impersonal?
   d. How is God related to pain and suffering?
      • Is He loving and good?
      • Is He all powerful and sovereign?

2. Genesis 1-3 addresses these questions.
   a. God is the creator in space and time. The creation is separate from God but reflects certain of his attributes - power, order, etc.
   b. Man is made in God’s image. Man is capable of communion with God. Man is above nature and yet tied to it.
   c. Evil is the result of man’s fall not God’s nature.
   d. The relationship between God who is holy and man who is not is fractured.

A. General non-Christian views of God.
   1. Primitive gods - animism - God’s spirit is a part of all nature.
2. Classic gods - Greek deities - the super-ego of man.

3. Eastern gods - pantheism - everything is god.
   Hinduism - Brahma (the whole of which we are individual parts or Atman). Nirvana is the state of being at rest as a person is at one with the universe.

4. The Islamic view of God – an impersonal, fatalistic, sovereign Master.

5. The Biblical God - Some common stereotypes
   a. The cosmic **policeman** - authoritative and judgmental.
   b. The religious **grandfather** - honored but out of touch.
   c. The spiritual **Santa clause** - useful but not respected.

6. How do we talk about the attributes of God?

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**B. The Greatness of God**

1. Spirituality (vs. materialism) God is not limited by the constraints of a physical body.
   a. John 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” Lk.24:39; Col.1:15; I Tim.1:17
   b. This doctrine is important in that it challenges idol worship and nature worship.
   c. Anthropomorphisms are expressions of truths about God through human analogies.
   d. Theophanies are temporary manifestations of God. Jesus, the man (God) who wrestled with Jacob in Gen.32:22-31.
   e. This attribute reminds us that the spiritual, not the material, reality is ultimate and eternal. This comes as a challenge to our modern culture’s preoccupation with the material aspects of life.

2. Personality (vs. pantheism) God is capable of relationships that are intimate, dynamic and yet maintain individual autonomy.
   a. God has a name which in Hebrew culture was the embodiment of the person bearing it. (Gen.4:26, Exod.3:14 (“I am”, Yahweh, Jehovah, the Lord)
      1. Jehovah-Jireh: The Lord will provide (Gen.22:13,14).
      2. Jehovah-Rapha: The Lord that healeth (Ex.15:26).
      5. Jehovah-Ra-ah: The Lord my Shepherd (Ps.23:1).
      7. Jehovah-Shammah: The Lord is Present (Ezek.48:35).
   b. God is pictured as knowing, communicating, talking, etc.
   c. God is called “father.” Matt.6:9).
   d. We are made in God’s image (Gen.1:26).
e. This attribute reminds us that the essence of what makes us human (our personhood) has its origin in God. God defines personhood in his being. We reflect personhood being made in His image.

3. **Life** (vs. death) The force that is life originates in God.
   a. Jer.10:10 “the living God”
   b. Jn.5:26 “the Father has life in himself”
   c. Life is the energy that enables a person or creature to be dynamic in responding to others. Spiritual life is the ability to respond to the Creator. Physical life is the ability to respond to the creation.

4. **Infinity** (vs. finiteness) God is not limited by space, time, and knowledge.
   a. Jer.23:23 “Am I a God at hand,. . . and not a God afar off?”
   b. With respect to **time**: Jude 25 “before all time and now and for ever.”
   c. With respect to **space**: Ps.139:7-12 “Where can I go from the presence of God?”
   d. With respect to **knowledge**: Rom.11:33 “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”
      (For more discussion of this subject see #309, #704)
   e. With respect to **power**: Matt.19:26 “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible”
   f. Pr.15:3 “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good.”
   g. Infinity is the attribute that enables God to relate to His creation completely and continuously as its originator, sustainer, and ultimate reason for being.

5. **Constancy** (vs. randomness) God’s nature and character do not change.
   a. Ps.33:11 “The counsel of the Lord stands for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”
   b. Mal.3:6 “I the Lord do not change”
   c. Jas.1:17 With God “there is no variation or shadow due to change.”
   d. What then do we make of those passages that seem to suggest that God changes his mind? Ex.32:14; Jonah 3:10; Gen.6:6
      1. Some are anthropomorphisms - descriptions of God’s actions and feelings in human terms.
      2. Some are new stages in the outworking of God’s plan.
      3. Some are a change in god’s orientation resulting from man’s move into a different relationship with God.
   e. This attribute is important in that it provides stability to the dynamic aspect of life and history. God is not a part of an evolving universe. He is not in process. He directs all processes to His ends.

6. What do we mean by, **“God’s will?”** (see lesson #12)
   a. God’s Will is **Determined**. (Is.14:24; Acts 4:27-28; Rom.9:19)
   b. God’s Will is **Directive**. (Col.4:12; Rom.12:2; Eph.5:17; Is. 48:17; Ps.32:8; 37:23; 73:24)
   c. God’s Will is **Dynamic**. (Rom.8:28, Lk.18:1-8)

C. **The significance of God’s GREATNESS.**
   1. Charting key attributes and their significance.
2. Practical significance of God’s greatness and power.

No one who takes the Bible seriously can deny the greatness of God. God is omnipotent; He is all-powerful. This truth transformed the lives of men in the past, and it can transform our lives today. Allow me to suggest several ways the power of God intersects our lives today.

(a) The first thing we should do, in light of the power of God, is to fear, honor, and serve God and God alone.

- **Exodus 20:1-7** “1 Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 7 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (see also Joshua 4:23-24; Psalm 115:1-15).

(b) Recognizing the Bible teaches God is infinitely powerful should remove the word “impossible” from our vocabulary.

- **Romans 8:8-11** “8 And those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you”.

- **Ephesians 1:18-21** “18 [I pray that] the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward
us who believe. [These are] in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places], far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

- **Ephesians 3:14-20** “14 For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; [and] that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,”

- **Colossians 1:9-12** “9 For this reason also, since the day we heard [of it], we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please [Him] in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

- **Colossians 1:29** “29 And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

(c) Our weakness is not a barrier to the power of God. Rather, recognizing our weakness is the basis for our turning to God, depending upon His power to work in us. In this way, God receives all the glory.

- **II Corinthians 4:7** “7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves.”

- **II Corinthians 12:7-10** “7 And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

- **I Corinthians 1:20-24** “20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not [come to] know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

- **I Corinthians 1:26-29** “26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has
chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God.”

- **I Corinthians 2:2-5** “2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”

- **II Timothy 3:5** “5 Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these.”

(d) **We would not give so much credit to Satan.**
If we really understood the power of God, we would not give so much credit to Satan. We would not look at Satan as though he and God were closely matched rivals who have battled for centuries. We would not dare suppose that in the end God will barely defeat this one who is our deadly foe. We would realize that God is the Creator, and Satan is but a creature. We would know that God’s power is infinite, while Satan’s is finite. We would not minimize Satan’s power, but neither would we overstate his power. God is not battling with Satan with the hope of defeating him; Satan is already a defeated foe, whose final demise is certain (John 12:31; 16:11; Luke 10:18). In the meantime, God is using Satan and his rebellion to achieve His purposes (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

(e) **We would not be quick to accept the message of the “good-life prophets”**
If we really understood and believed in the power of God, we would not believe those evangelists of health and wealth who line their own pockets by assuring donors that God is standing by with all His power, eager to do their bidding. They lay claim on God’s power by “faith,” by claiming certain possessions like money and healing. “God doesn’t want us to suffer,” they say, “but to prosper.” If they really believed in God’s power, they would know God’s power can just as well sustain us through suffering and affliction as it can deliver us from suffering and affliction. They refuse to accept that God often works through suffering to sustain and purify the saint and to demonstrate His grace and power to a lost and dying world (again, see 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

(f) **We would not be so reluctant to obey**
If we really believed in the power of God, we would not be so reluctant to obey those commands of God which seem to leave us vulnerable (like, “sell your possessions and give to the poor,” or see I Corinthians 7:29-30 for a more general version). And we would not excuse ourselves from obeying the “impossible” commands like, “love your enemy.” We would live our lives much more dangerously if we really believed God is omnipotent.

“18 [I pray that] the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. [These are] in accordance with the working of the strength of His might . . . 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; [and] that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 1:18-19; 3:16-19).
D. **Additional Thoughts on the Power of God**

(1) Creation is a witness to God’s power (Romans 1:20).

(2) The gospel is powerful; the power of God can save and radically change men (Romans 1:16).

(3) Saints are saved, kept, and constantly empowered for life and ministry by the power of God (Romans 15:13, 18-19; I Corinthians 1:18; 6:4; Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:11, 29).

(4) The resurrection of Christ, and subsequently of every Christian, is through the power of God (Romans 1:4; I Corinthians 15:43).

(5) Even the unbelief and rebellion of men is used by God to demonstrate His power (Romans 9:17).

(6) God’s delay in punishing evil-doers is not an indication of His inability to handle the situation, but an indication of His intention to demonstrate His power (Exodus 9:13-18; Romans 9:22).

(7) God’s choice and use of Christians, as foolish, weak and earthy vessels of clay is to demonstrate His power (I Corinthians 1:18–2:5).

(8) God’s power is ministered to and through man’s human weaknesses, rather than through man’s natural human strengths.

“8 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me”’ (II Corinthians 12:8-9).

“4 For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we shall live with Him because of the power of God [directed] toward you”’ (II Corinthians 13:4).

E. **What God’s Power Enables Him To Do**

(1) All power belongs to God—“*Thine is the power...*” (Matthew 6:13).

(2) He can therefore do all things (Matthew 19:26; Mark 14:36).

(3) Nothing is impossible for God (Luke 1:34-37).

(4) He is able to do what He has purposed (Job 42:1-2; Isaiah 14:27).

(5) He is able to do what He has promised (Romans 4:21).

(6) He is able to judge because He can save and destroy (James 4:12).

(7) He is able to destroy the body and soul in hell (Matthew 10:28).

(8) He is able to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6).

(9) He is able to save us (Isaiah 63:1; Psalm 54:1; Romans 1:16), forever (Hebrews 7:25).

(10) He is able to defend us, to overcome our enemies (Psalm 59:9-11).

(11) He is able to deliver us (Daniel 3-4).

(12) He is able to protect (Psalm 79:1; 91:1) or rescue us (Psalm 79:11).

(13) He is able to make us stand (Romans 14:4).

(14) He is able to come to our aid when tempted (Hebrews 2:18).

(15) He is able to establish us as His saints (Romans 16:25).

(16) He is able to keep Christians (John 10:29; Romans 8:31-39), to keep us from falling (Jude 1:24-25).

(17) He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him to the day of His coming (II Timothy 1:12).
(18) He is able to raise the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19).
(19) He is able to provide everything for life and godliness (II Peter 1:3).
(20) He is able to empower us to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

F. How Is The Power of God Exercised or Demonstrated?

1. **In weakness** (II Corinthians 12:9-10; 13:4).
2. **In simplicity and clarity, rather than human sophistication and persuasion** (I Corinthians 1 and II Corinthians 2:14-17; 4:1-6).
3. **In a simple proclamation of the gospel** (Romans 1:16).
4. **By the exercise of spiritual gifts** (Ephesians 3:7).
5. **By prayer** (Ephesians 3:14-21).
6. **By dying daily and thus being conformed to Christ’s death** (Philippians 3:10).

“22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?” (Romans 9:22)

“13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

“18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, 19 in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:18-19).

“18 For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18).

“24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (I Corinthians 1:24).

“19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power” (I Corinthians 4:19-20).

“4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,” (I Corinthians 5:4).

“14 Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power” (I Corinthians 6:14).

“24 then [comes] the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power” (I Corinthians 15:24).

“43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;” (I Corinthians 15:43)

“5 in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,” (II Corinthians 6:5)

“6 in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love,” (II Corinthians 6:6)

“7 in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, (II Corinthians 6:7)

“19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. [These are] in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places], 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every
name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.’” (Ephesians 1:19-21).

“7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power” (Ephesians 3:7).

“10 that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;” (Philippians 3:10)

“21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:21).

“5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake” (I Thessalonians 1:5).

“9 And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power;” (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

“11 To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power;” (II Thessalonians 1:11)

“7 For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with [me] in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,” (II Timothy 1:7)

“5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these” (II Timothy 3:5).

(7) God saves us by His power.

(8) The kingdom of God and power:

“19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power” (I Corinthians 4:19-20).

(9) God’s power and the gospel:

“18 For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18).

“24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (I Corinthians 1:24).

(10) God’s power and the resurrection of Christ.

(11) God’s power and the Scriptures.

(12) God’s power and the Holy Spirit.

“13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

“18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:18-19).

(13) God’s power and human weakness.

(14) God’s power and those who oppose God and His servants.
“22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?” (Romans 9:22)

“16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

“20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

“17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH” (Romans 9:17).

**Pastoral advice**

**What are the implications of God’s greatness?**

1. These attributes are the basis of much of the meaning we find in life. This is where we find a sense of purpose, dignity, and community.

2. God’s greatness demands that we show our appreciation in our worship, that we bow in humility out of respect, and that we exercise human responsibility with confidence.

3. When we ask ourselves, “Which of the attributes of God are most meaningful to us personally and why?” we can learn a lot about ourselves and our environment.

4. How does Satan challenge our perception of God in our day?

**Questions that you should be able to answer.**

1. **Specific facts you should know.**
   a. What are three dimensions of God’s will?
   b. What is meant by “anthropomorphism” and “theophany”?

2. **Issues that you should be able to discuss.**
   a. Which of God’s attributes of greatness are capable of being manifested in the lives of His people?
   b. What would be the consequences for our lives if each of God’s attributes were absent?

3. **Questions you should wrestle with.**
   a. How is God related to time?
   b. How are time and foreknowledge related in God?