

"GOD IS . . ."

Part 1 - Independent | Exodus 3:11-14; Acts 17:24-25

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on April 8, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Today we are beginning a seven part series on the attributes of God. God's attributes describe what he is like and what he is not like.
 - One author writes this: **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** *"I know the idea of "studying" God often rubs people the wrong way. It sounds cold and theoretical, as if God were a frog carcass to dissect in a lab or a set of ideas that we memorize like math proofs. But studying God doesn't have to be like that. You can study him the way you study a sunset that leaves you speechless. You can study him the way a man studies the wife he passionately loves. Does anyone fault him for noting her every like and dislike? Is it clinical for him to desire to know the thoughts and longings of her heart? Or to want to hear her speak? Knowledge doesn't have to be dry and lifeless. And when you think about it, exactly what is our alternative? Ignorance? Falsehood? We're either building our lives in the reality of what God is truly like and what he's about, or we're basing our lives on our own imagination and misconceptions. We're all theologians. The question is whether what we know about God is true."*¹
 - So my aim in this series is not simply that you might know *about* God, but that you might *know* God. I echo the words of Mark Buchanan when writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** *"I will have failed if God is named but not praised, analyzed but not glorified, seen but not sought."*²
- Theologians often divide God's attributes into two categories: His *communicable attributes* and His *incommunicable attributes*.
 - Communicable attributes are those attributes that God shares or communicates with us because He created us to be like him. For instance, God is loving. This is a communicable attribute because God has also made us with the ability to love. We are *like* God in this.
 - An incommunicable attribute is an attribute that God has but that we do not share with him. They are those traits that are unique to God himself. For instance, God is omnipresent, which means he is present everywhere. We are *not like* God in this.
- In this series I first want to look at three incommunicable attributes and then we will look at four communicable attributes.
 - This morning I am praying that the incommunicable attribute we are going to look at would stir our hearts to worship, like it stirred my daughter Emily's heart to worship when she was just five years old.
 - In teaching my kids how to pray we often begin with **"I praise you God because..."** and then we fill in the blank. One night I was teaching her of an

¹ Joshua Harris, *Dug Down Deep*, 11.

² Mark Buchanan, *The Holy Wild*, 30.

incommunicable attribute of God, namely that God is self-existent – that he was never made and never born.

- Emily then prayed, ***“Father in heaven. I praise you because you were never made and were never born.”*** Then she paused for a long time. It was like the penny dropped in her mind. Suddenly she saw how different God was. Her little heart was awestruck. And then in the most humble and heartfelt words of worship she said, ***“We’re not like that.”***
- This morning I want to show you that when you see how God is not like you, it evokes a deep sense of worship. Furthermore, I want to show you that when you see how God is not like you it will empower you to serve him and save you from discouragement and despair. To that end, we will do three things this morning:
 - First, we will *define God’s independence*, second we will *demonstrate God’s independence from the scriptures*, and third we will *draw out four responses to God’s independence*.

DEFINING GOD’S INDEPENDENCE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** First then, let’s **define God’s independence**. Wayne Grudem defines it this way: **(SHOW SLIDE 5) “God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything.”** To guard against misunderstanding Grudem then adds a balancing statement **(SHOW SLIDE 6) “God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation can glorify him and bring him joy.”**³
 - This is what blew Emily’s mind and should blow yours. God was never made. God was never born. God has life in himself. God does not need us to be happy. God is entirely self-existent and self-sufficient.
- Older theologians referred to God’s independence using a different word. They called it ‘aseity.’ Aseity is from the Latin words ‘a se’ which mean ‘from himself.’ This does not mean that God caused himself to come into existence.
 - Hear this now: Aseity, or independence, means that God has no cause. God is the only uncaused being that there is. As a result, God is not dependent on anyone or anything outside of Himself.

GOD IS SELF-EXISTENT

- Let’s turn now to **(SHOW SLIDE 7) demonstrate God’s independence from scripture**.
 - There are two senses in which the Bible speaks about God’s independence.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** First, **God’s independence means that God is self-existent**.
 - This is powerfully brought out in Exodus 3. One day Moses is walking through the desert and he sees a bush on fire and yet the bush does not burn up. From within the fire a voice calls to him. **READ 5-6 - Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”** ⁶**And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 160.

- God then tells Moses that He is going to send Him to free the Israelites from their slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt. Moses is not very excited about sticking his finger in the face of the world's most powerful monarch. Look at his response in verse 11. **READ 11-14 - But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"**¹² **He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."**¹³ **Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"**¹⁴ **God said to Moses, "I am who I am."** **And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'"**
- Does this not seem like a strange answer to you? It almost seems as if God is saying, **"Never mind what my name is. I am who am I and that is all you need to know. Now stop asking questions."** But that does not make sense because God says that this is His name and the name he wants to be known as for all time. As strange as it may sound to us God's name is "I AM."
 - I AM is translated as YAHWEH in modern times, Jehovah in old times, and most translations used the word LORD in capital letters. So every time you see LORD capitalized you must realize that it is not a title. It is not referring to the fact that God is the one in charge. That is true but that is not what it means. When you see it capitalized it is referring to God's name. His name is YAHWEH and his name appears 6519 times in the Old Testament.
- Names in ancient times told you about a person's character – what they are like. What does this tell us about God? I AM is a form of the verb 'to be'. This name proclaims then that God is self-existent, that He has being in Himself. The I AM causes all things to be but His being is uncaused.
 - Do you see then why the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus in John 8? Jesus said, **"Before Abraham was, I AM."** In other words, **"Before Abraham ever existed, I existed as the uncaused Creator."**
 - R.C. Sproul brings this all together: **(SHOW SLIDE 9) "The grand difference between a human being and a Supreme Being is precisely this: Apart from God, I cannot exist; apart from me, God does exist. God does not need me in order for Him to be. I do need God in order for me to be. This is the difference between what we call a self-existent Being and a dependent being...we do not have the power of being within themselves. We are dependent. We are fragile. We cannot live without air, without water, without food...We are like flowers that bloom and then wither and fade. This is how we differ from God. God does not wither, God does not fade, God is not fragile."**⁴
- The British poet W.E. Henley had a leg amputated as a teenager. Yet he went on to have a brilliant career as a critic and author. As a young man Henley defiantly penned the famous poem *Invictus*, which is Latin for 'unconquered.'

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *The Character of God*, 24.

- **(SHOW SLIDE 10) “It matters not how strait the gate
how charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.”**
- This is a very distorted view of reality and is filled with pride. Of course we all value the importance of learning to overcome obstacles in life but Henley’s success was dependent on many factors such as being born in a first-world country and receiving an education.
 - Ironically Henley was forced to face the fact that he was not independent when his five-year-old daughter died, a blow from which he never recovered.
 - We are not the masters of our fate or the captains of our souls. We are dependent creatures. Our entire existence hangs on one little word – ‘if’. *If* God grants us being we will exist. *If* he allows our brains to function we will think. *If* he grants our hearts to beat we will keep living. If, if, if.
- But the word ‘if’ does not apply to God’s existence. He has always been. Nothing caused Him. He is not dependent. As Jesus said in John 5, **“God has life in Himself.”**
 - We do not have life in myself. We’re not like that. Be staggered by this truth: God’s independence means He is self-existent.

GOD IS SELF-SUFFICIENT

- There is a second thing that necessarily follows from God’s self-existence. In the second place let me demonstrate from scripture that **(SHOW SLIDE 11) God’s independence means that God is self-sufficient.** Turn with me to Acts 17
- Before we look at this text let me ask you a deep question: why did God create the universe? Why did He create you? In the ancient myths the gods created humanity because they needed humanity to serve them. Did God create the universe because he needed to do it?
 - In Acts 17 Paul is preaching to people who believed such things. **READ 22-23** - ²² **So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.**
 - So Paul is going to declare who God is and what He is like. Where does He begin? With God’s love? With God’s plan for your life? No. He begins with an incommunicable attributes of God. He begins with God’s aseity. **READ 24-25** - ²⁴ **The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.**
- Unlike the Greek and Roman gods, YAHWEH does not need us for life because he has life in himself and gives life. Moreover, YAHWEH does not need our help to do anything. He does not need puny humans hands to do anything for Him when his little finger can lift 10,000 galaxies as easily as you lift a pen. He does not need your worship. He does not need your money. He does not need your help. We never do God a favour.
 - How many times have I heard mission’s presentations or a call to evangelism that says, **“God wants lost people to be saved but he cannot do it without you. He needs**

you to do this” as if we exist to help out poor old God. Now I am going to say in a few minutes that God calls us to play a part in what he is doing to save sinners but let us never act as if poor old God *requires* our help.

- John Stott writes, (SHOW SLIDE 12) **“Any attempt to tame or domesticate God, to reduce him to the level of a household pet dependent on us for food and shelter, is again a ridiculous reversal of roles. We depend on God; he does not depend on us.”**⁵

➤ So, God’s independence means that He is self-existent and self-sufficient.

RESPONSE #1 - FALL ON YOUR FACE

- Let’s turn in the third place to **draw out four responses from what we have learned.** (SHOW SLIDE 13) **Response #1: fall on your face in worship.**
 - This message goes completely against the me-centred, self-actualizing, self-fulfilling, self-esteeming culture of our day. In our culture God exists for you. One of the best selling books in these past few years is called *The Secret*.
- Author Rhonda Byrne says the secret is **“the law of attraction.”** She claims that everything in the universe, especially your thoughts, vibrate a certain frequency. When you think thoughts in harmony with something you attract it. If you think about wealth, you will receive wealth. So the whole universe revolves around you and by your mere thoughts you can control your destiny. Byrne writes,
 - **“The earth turns on its orbit for You. The oceans ebb and flow for You...The sun rises and sets for You...Every beautiful thing you see, every wondrous thing you experience, is all there for You...None of it can exist, without you. No matter who you thought you were, now you know the Truth of Who You Really Are. You are the master of the Universe...And now you know The Secret.”**⁶
- The Bible begins with this fact: **“It’s not about you. It’s all about God.”** When this reality dawns on you the only proper response is to fall on your face. Oh how the church herself needs to recapture this vision of God. Can I be perfectly honest with you?
 - I am utterly weary of worship songs that talk about Jesus as if he were someone’s boyfriend rather than the Saviour and Lord of all. I am weary of sermons that are fluffy little talks on how to be a better person rather than sermons jam packed with the glory of God and the grace of Christ. I am weary of worship services that are totally lacking reverence, depth, and awe.
- I want the God that Isaiah saw when He cried out, **“I am undone.”** I want the God of Ezekiel who when he saw him said, **“I fell facedown.”** I want the God of John who when he saw him said, **“I fell at his feet as though dead.”** I want the God who **“sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,” “who stretches out the heavens like a canopy,”** who **“brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.”**
 - I want **“the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”** He is the I AM WHO I AM and the only proper response to Him is to fall on our faces in worship.

⁵ John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 285.

⁶ Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret*, 183.

RESPONSE #2 - CONFESS YOUR SIN

- **(SHOW SLIDE 14) Response #2: confess your sin.** All sin boils down to just one thing: every sin is a puny dependent human creature setting up his or her own throne in opposition to God and declaring from that throne, “I AM.”
 - Rather than living as dependent creatures before our God, kneeling before His throne, and making all of our lives revolve around Him, we have declared independence from God. We have set ourselves up as our own little gods. We have tried to make life revolve around us. Our declaration of independence is therefore an act of cosmic treason.
- This is when God’s other attributes become very scary. For God is also a just God and as a just God he will give to rebels what rebels deserve. For our continual acts of treason God will judge and punish us. Our only hope is to fall on our face before his throne, confess our sins, and plead for mercy.
 - Now if God’s only attribute was independence we would be in trouble for he does not need us, our worship, our love, our prayers, and therefore has no reason to show mercy. If he was only just and independent we would be doomed. But God is also gracious and loving.

RESPONSE #3 - RECEIVE GOD’S GRACE

- The third response then is to **(SHOW SLIDE 15) receive God’s grace.** After all that has been said you may wonder if God cares about you at all or if human beings have any value. This is why Grudem gave the balancing statement to his definition of God’s independence. He said, **(SHOW SLIDE 16) “God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation can glorify him and bring him joy.”**⁷
 - Millard Erickson writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 17) “While God is independent in the sense of not needing anything else for his existence, this is not to say that he is aloof, indifferent, or unconcerned. God relates to us, but by his choice, not because he is compelled to by some need.”**⁸
- It is right here that the message of the Bible is such good news. The Bible declares that God, out of love, and in an act of underserved favour, sent Jesus to be punished in our place. Jesus’ name means ‘YAHWEH to the rescue’ or ‘YAHWEH saves.’ Do you see then how God’s independence magnifies his love and grace?
 - The very God who does not need to be in relationship with you has set his love upon you, and given up His Son, that He might be in relationship with you.
 - The very God who owes you nothing paid your debt of sin in Christ.
 - The very God who is not obligated to give you anything has given you absolutely everything in Jesus Christ.
 - The very God who has no need of you loves you and cares for you and has demonstrated this supremely to you by giving His Son for you.
 - The good news is that it is all of grace. You do not have to earn his favour back. He owes you nothing but gives you everything. Hallelujah!

⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 160.

⁸ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 298.

RESPONSE #4 - SERVE WITH STRENGTH

- **(SHOW SLIDE 18) Response #4: serve with strength.** The God who needs nothing from you not only restores you to himself, he also invites you to serve Him. He does not need us but he graciously chooses to use us. In particular he calls us to serve Him by telling others about what God has done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
 - But like Moses we all respond by saying, ***“who am I that I should go and tell people about Jesus?”*** Moses, like us, felt inadequate and scared. How did God encourage him? Did he send him to a seminar, tell him to read a book, or tell him to believe in himself?
 - No, he told him his name!
- There is something critical that I did not tell you earlier about the name YAHWEH. It is not simply a declaration that God is. It is a promise that God will be with Moses in all he does. God told Moses, ***“I will be with you”*** and then gave Moses His name. In other words, God’s name means, ***“I, the self-existent God, will be with you and for you.”*** Isn’t that amazing! The independent, self-existing, self-sufficient God, says that his very nature is to be with us and for us.
 - When YAHWEH came in human flesh he invited us into His work of making disciples of all nations. Knowing how inadequate we would feel YAHWEH in human flesh said, ***“surely I will be with you to the very end of the age.”***
 - This is why I recommend that every time you read capitalized LORD you translate it and say YAWWEH. I always do this because, I need to hear his name. I need to hear that the self-existent, self-sufficient God who does not need me promises to be with me and for me as I serve him.
- Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, said,
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 19) *“Many Christians estimate difficulty in the light of their own resources, and thus they attempt very little, and they always fail. All giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His power and His presence to be with them.”***
- David Livingstone spent his life wading through the dangerous jungles of Africa, battling sickness and threats to his life in order to take the message of Jesus Christ to lost people. He said,
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 20) *“Would you like me to tell you what supported me through all the years of exile among people whose language I could not understand, and whose attitude towards me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this: ‘And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’ On these words I staked everything, and they never failed!”***
 - Oh that I could go on to encourage you for another hour to step out fearless in service to tell others of Jesus. But let me leave you with the name of God. He is Yahweh. He is the self-existent, self-sufficient God who is with you and for you.

Responsive Reading

Slide 21:

Leader: “This is what the LORD says— Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God” (Is 44:6).

People: We humble ourselves before you.

Slide 22:

Leader: “Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it” (Is 44:7).

People: There is no one like you, Yahweh, our God.

Slide 23:

Leader: “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it” (Ps 50:9-12).

People: We confess that you alone have life in yourself. We confess that we are dependent on you for all things.

Slide 24:

People: We also confess that we have sinned against you by what we have done and by what we have left undone. Is there any hope for us?

Leader: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. . . . You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Lk 2:10; Mt 1:21).

Slide 25:

People: But how will Yahweh-to-the-Rescue save us from our sins?

Leader: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him” (Is 53:5).

Slide 26:

People: But our sins are great and many.

Leader: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Rom 8:33-34).

Slide 27:

People: Jesus, we worship you, the great I AM. We worship you as the God who is with us and for us.

Slide 28:

All: To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Rev 5:13).