

Knowing God *Study Guide*

Section Two: Behold Your God **Teacher's Edition**

**An Exercise in Spiritual
Growth and Discipleship
Using the Book *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer**

by

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For Leading Study Groups or Personal Self-Study

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Notes for the Teacher's/Self Study Edition Section Two

Welcome to the Teacher's/Self-Study Edition of the Knowing God Study Guide for Section Two: Behold Your God. I pray that God blesses your efforts to assist others and yourself in coming to know Him. I produced this edition to assist those who are leading groups through the book using my study materials or for those who can only do the study on their own.

Important: It is essential that you initially approach each lesson like your students or if you are studying alone without the aid of this additional material. After you have worked your way through the Chapter and the lesson, writing down your answers, you can use these materials to help you prepare for the group or, if alone, to give you feedback on what you thought and wrote. Without this important step, the effectiveness of your study will be reduced considerably. This is an aid to your work, not a means to avoid it.

All of the additions to the text in the standard Knowing God Study Guide Section Two are in the blue text and the font (Calibri) used for this section of notes. The difference is distinguishable even when printed in black and white. This color was chosen so that people with one of the various color blindness issues would still be able to distinguish the color difference (<http://www.mrexcel.com/forum/showthread.php?t=374530>). If this color is inappropriate for you, let me know, and I will produce a different version. (KnowingGod@meisheid.com)

As you work through the study, you should always remember that these additions are my insights and suggestions. While these are gleaned from many years of teaching Knowing God, this effort is designed to be an inductive study. That means drawing out the meaning of Dr. Packer's text to assist you in better apprehending and understanding his arguments about the truths he presents about God. So, take everything in *blue* as **suggestions**. Dr. Packer's arguments and my suggestions are meant to be a beginning point for discussion and further study. *Knowing God* was written as a deep primer for the everyday Christian about the meat of the Gospel ([Hebrews 5:14-6:3](#)). There will be things you disagree with, but there is one thing I can guarantee: when you complete this study, you will never be the same AND you will have a well-rounded understanding of the fundamental meat of the Christian Gospel. Where you go from there is up to you, but I have found repeated study of these materials to be one of the most important things I have done in my Christian life.

At the end of each chapter lesson, there is a meditation primarily taken from the time I went through this study on my blog, Beyond the Rim... (beyondtherim.meisheid.com). These meditations, which serve as a review of the lesson, have been edited for inclusion in this edition. I pray they are an asset to your study efforts.

The fundamental thing to keep in mind throughout this study is that we can come to **know God** because He wants us to do just that. He is our eternal Father who loves us, knows everything about us, the good and, yes, the bad (all of it, even the deepest secret bad things), yet still pursues us as a true Father who pursues, loves, and cares for his beloved children. No matter how alone we may feel He has not forgotten us; He is always one fervent prayer away. This study is a fulfillment of God's earnest desire for us—to know Him. May God bless your efforts. Grace and peace.

In closing, please consider assisting me in this ministry. I am always looking for feedback to make this study more effective for both you and your study partners. Therefore, it will be a big help to my efforts if you sent me your experiences with this study and any suggestions for improvement. Nothing is too small or insignificant.

Thank you

Grace and peace,

William Meisheid (<mailto:KnowingGod@meisheid.com>)

Preface to Section Two

As we continue our study of *Knowing God*, we, as realistic students, continue to look to the Bereans for inspiration on examining the questions of our faith. Therefore, we scrutinize everything said to see if it is true (using the Scriptures as our arbiter of truth), faithfully moving forward in our efforts to know Him with whom we have to do.

Tolkien on Knowing God

At the age of 77, Tolkien was asked by his publisher's daughter about the meaning of life. In a letter postmarked May 20, 1969, he said (in part):

So it may be said that the chief purpose of life, for any one of us, is to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all the means we have and to be moved by it to praise and thanks. To do as we say in the *Gloria in Excelsis*:

‘ . . . We praise you; we call you holy; we worship you, we proclaim your glory; we thank you for the greatness of your splendor.’

“And in moments of exaltation, we may call on all created things to join in our chorus, speaking on their behalf, as in Psalm 148 and The Song of the Three Children in Daniel II. ‘PRAISE THE LORD . . . all mountains and hills, all orchards and forests, all things that creep and birds on the wing.’”

Taken from *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Mariner Books, June 2000.

A prayer for this study

Every meaningful endeavor in life should be grounded in prayer, and this is no different. May this prayer aid you in your efforts as you go through the study.

Dear Lord God, you have challenged us in your Word to study to show ourselves approved and you told us to leave aside the milk of the Gospel and mature into its meat. Open our hearts, O Lord, and prepare us to learn of you, to drink deep of your revelation of yourself. And as we come to know you better, O Lord, may we also know ourselves better. Grant us, by your grace, success in our efforts.

May your Holy Spirit, by his witness, authenticate what we study and learn, and may we always remember that the Spirit testifies and leads us into all truth and knowledge of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As we struggle to apprehend the faith once delivered to the saints, we thank you, O Lord, for your mercy and patience with us as we endeavor to better understand you and ourselves. May everything we do be done to your eternal honor and glory. Amen.

William (Bill) G. Meisheid

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Section Two: Behold Your God!

We now begin Section Two, looking at the God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) we were introduced to in Section One, the unfathomable Three-in-One.

Just as Packer uses each chapter as a foundation for the next, he similarly uses each section. We will now flesh out our understanding of our Trinitarian God by closely examining what He shows us about himself.

Scriptures

[Isaiah 35:4](#) Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you."

"The *recompense of God*..." Recompense is an interesting and seldom-used word. Other translations use "divine retribution/vengeance" or "redressing all wrongs." Recompense means compensation for loss or injury. Our God is saying that He will take care of everything, since elsewhere he has told us ([Romans 12:19](#)) that vengeance belongs to the Lord; he will repay; he will put all things right; he will restore everything to its proper place because He is God. There are two aspects to our peace in this world: the knowledge of our salvation in Christ, firmly implanted in our soul so that our hearts (our emotional life) and our minds (our intellectual life) are guarded against any assault that diminishes the truth of our salvation. ([Philippians 4:7](#)).

[Isaiah 40:9](#) O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

Behold! It means a lot more than see or look at. It carries the additional meaning of comprehending or understanding. You could say, "Look at your God and understand!" or, as we are seeking in this study, "Look at your God and KNOW!" This is a good scripture to meditate on for this section.

[John 14:9](#) Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'"

Thomas asked Jesus to fill that God-shaped hole in the center of his being, and Jesus told him the answer was right in front of him. Isn't that often the truth? God is right in front of us, wanting us to know Him. What are we waiting for?

[John 20:28](#) "Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

It took until Thomas saw the resurrected Jesus for him to comprehend the answer to his earlier question (previous scripture). Now he knows. He sees God right in front of him; his earlier request is dramatically fulfilled.

Quotes

"You see many stars at night in the sky but find them not when the sun rises; can you say that there are no stars in the heaven of day? So, O man! Because you behold not God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God." Anonymous

I love this quotation about the limits of our vision at different times and how it applies to this section. As you work through this study, think about its implications.

"Hence that dread and amazement with which, as Scripture uniformly relates, holy men were struck and overwhelmed whenever they beheld the presence of God, men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance until they have." John Calvin

Calvin understood the human heart. Deep in our hearts, we all think we are something special until we apprehend God. Then (and probably only then) do we come face to face with the conviction of our own eternal insignificance, much like the author of Psalm 22 understood: "But I am a worm and no man..." We

cannot face God and remain standing because our sin precedes us. Forgiven or not, we will comprehend our utter worthlessness.

In my youth, a bad acid trip stood me before the devil with the maw of hell gaping before me. I tried with all that I had and had been to find something to use to trade my way out of his desire to drag me down to perdition. There was nothing; believe me, I diligently searched my entire life. Everything came up wanting, and from that moment until the day I die, I will always comprehend my utter worthlessness when left to myself. It is only in Christ that I have anything, anything at all, that matters when it comes to eternal things. I fully understand Calvin.

The Incomprehensible

By Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

FAR in the Heavens my God retires:
My God, the mark of my desires,
And hides his lovely face;
When he descends within my view,
He charms my reason to pursue,
But leaves it tir'd and fainting in th' unequal chase.

Or if I reach unusual height
Till near his presence brought,
There floods of glory check my flight,
Cramp the bold pinions of my wit,
And all untune my thought;
Plunged in a sea of light I roll,
Where wisdom, justice, mercy, shines;
Infinite rays in crossing lines
Beat thick confusion on my sight, and overwhelm my soul.

Great God! behold my reason lies
Adoring: yet my love would rise
On pinions not her own:
Faith shall direct her humble flight,
Through all the trackless seas of light,
To Thee, th' Eternal Fair, the infinite Unknown.

Isaac Watts: He is viewed as the Father of English Hymnody. He composed over 750 hymns, including *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*, *Joy to the World*, and others. He was the first to compose regular hymns rather than put Psalms to music. Watts was a nonconformist Congregationalist minister who published numerous books.

We often wonder how knowing God will change us. It changed Isaac Watts, according to the witness of Dr. Samuel Johnson (who wrote the first English dictionary). "...by his natural temper, he was quick of resentment; but, by his established and habitual practice, he was gentle, modest, and inoffensive."

Isaac Watts was a good example of God taking the lump of sinful clay that Watts was as a man and molding him into a divinely inspired vessel useful for His service.

Chapter 7: God Unchanging

Today's theme: God, the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, forever immutable.

God's unchanging immutability means that he is *utterly* reliable.

Scriptural background: [Numbers 23:19](#) "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

His *Word* makes it so. As physics moves us toward creation being composed of the "music of the spheres," where everything is made up of vibrations at different frequencies (God speaking), we are reminded that it is His Word that upholds all things (Hebrews 1:3).

[Psalm 33:11](#) "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."

He does not change his plan because of anything we do. We need to remember that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. ([Romans 11:29](#))

Quotes for the week

"As my high school teacher, Miss Julia Coleman, used to say: "We must adjust to changing times and still hold to unchanging principles." Jimmy Carter. *Inaugural address*. Thursday, January 20, 1977.

You can agree with this statement no matter where you stand on Jimmy Carter. It is something to aspire to for your *whole* life, not something to abandon when the going gets tough. We must be flexible and rock solid simultaneously—no mean task. The only unchanging principles I know are those established by God in his Word.

"We need to learn to set our course by the stars, not by the lights of every passing ship." Omar Nelson Bradley. U.S. general, 1893-1981.

We cannot navigate by constantly changing points of reference. To stay on course, we require fixed, unchanging points of reference.

"I have my faults, but *changing my tune* is not one of them." Samuel Beckett. *The Unnamable*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1953. English: New York, Grove Press, 1958.

The Apostle James warns us not to be double-minded (changing our tune); it will make us unstable in everything we do. It appears Beckett eventually changed his tune, becoming one of the first postmodernists later in his life (they do not accept objective truth as being real but a social construct for the moment; hence, all meaning is changeable). Only God never changes his tune.

This is important to our understanding of how much of the contemporary liberal Christian church can modify the fundamentals of the Christian faith with apparent impunity in their minds. As postmodernists, they see themselves reinterpreting "the truth" in its current social context since they do not believe in objective absolutes. To them, everything is shifting sand, not the rock of Christ.

One Caveat: There is such a thing as foolish consistency, where we hold onto error despite the need to change our views. We need to grow, change, and mature into Christ's fullness. We, not God, must change.

Concern: Will we fail to comprehend that God is dependable and unchanging, unlike us?

Unlike us, God is dependable and unchanging. We, on the other hand, are only intermittently reliable. We often break under pressure or temptation. This behavior makes it hard for us to relate to God because we tend to think of unchanging in a negative light. There is an aphorism that applies here: "Change or die," which does not apply to God. However, it is difficult to relate to that immutability without considering it negatively rigid.

The world of the scriptures is so different from our world that sometimes, we find it hard to recognize the God we see in the pages of the Old Testament. Because of this, we must be careful not to see two different Gods (OT and NT) and drive a wedge between our understanding of the God of Moses and Israel and the God and Father of Jesus Christ. They are the same.

That is a real problem in our postmodern world. God says He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow; He is the Great I AM. When I was a young Christian, I was told by the husband and wife, discipling me, that my most difficult growth as a Christian would come when I began to deal with God as He is, not as I wanted Him to be. Accepting that the God of the OT is the same as the God of the NT is something many professing Christians in our modern world are not able to do. One frequent thing I hear repeatedly is, "That is not the God I believe in." Only one response is possible to that statement: "God is, and we either accept or reject Him as He has revealed Himself to be." Attempting to remake our understanding of God into something more palatable is a form of idolatry and was dealt with in Chapter Four. Ultimately, it is all about submission and trust in the God with whom we have to do.

What problems (think about the surrounding culture) do we encounter when trying to hold fast to unchanging biblical principles in the world in which we live today?

In a world driven by pragmatism in science and technology (whatever works) and "whatever feels good" in the prevailing culture, we are constantly challenged to give up all the absolutes we hold to. This is the water in which we swim. We cannot escape it and remain in the world (John 17:9-16). Thinking back to Isaac Watts, we must learn by habitual practice to separate ourselves from this mindset. Remember that Jesus exhorts us to be in the world while remaining separate from the world. It is a very difficult task that causes many to build with wood, hay, and stubble ([1 Corinthians 3:12ff](#)).

What do you (personally) set your course by? Why?

This will be a personal response. For me, it is the Word and that alone. It saved me; it was my life preserver when I was drowning and trying to figure out what to believe during a flashback from a bad LSD trip shortly after I accepted the Lord as my Savior. I took my Bible in hand and staked my hope, my belief, my very life, and all that would make me a Christian on what it contained and nothing else. That has been my guiding compass and anchor in every storm ever since.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To learn about the unchanging nature of God. To grasp His immutability (not being subject or susceptible to change) and its ramifications for us as Christians, especially as it relates to his trustworthiness and dependability.

I have always liked Einstein's statement, "God does not play dice with the universe." That was important to Albert because, without that assurance, science is not possible. It depends on the universe being consistent and its laws being reliable. How can we argue for that in science but reject it in our theology?

1. How is God's immutability directly related to the validity and trustworthiness of His Word, the Scriptures, which define who we are and what we believe as Christians?

(p. 75-77) The authority and reliability of the Scriptures rest with God himself, and His Word reflects that. Scripture argues that what God says, he does, and he does not change his mind like we do. He is utterly trustworthy, so what he says, His Word—the Bible, is utterly trustworthy. God does not change, nor does His Word; therefore, what His Word demands or promises never changes. It is the rock on which we build our understanding, our system of belief, our faith, our hope, our purpose, and our plans.

"God is not a man, that He should lie,
Nor a son of man, that He should repent.
Has He said, and will He not do?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" [Number 23:19](#)

The context of this statement is when Balak, the King of the Moabites, attempted to get Balaam, an elder of

Chapter 7: God Unchanging

Midian, to curse Israel so he could defeat them. This Scripture demonstrates that God does not change his mind. He has blessed Israel and will hold to His Word no matter what. In the end, we also must be like Balaam, who says to Balak:

"...I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad *of my own will*. What the LORD says, that I must speak..." [Numbers 24:13b](#)

What the immutable, trustworthy Lord says, what His Word, His Scriptures demand, that we must say, speak, and therefore do.

2. What does Packer say links us to the events and personages found in the Old Testament? Why is this important?

(p. 76-77) God himself is the link. They and we deal with the same unchanging, immutable God. Hebrews 12 makes it abundantly clear that they relate to God "by faith." He relates to us according to His eternal purposes that do not change. From the first soul (Adam) to the last of us ever born, we all relate the same way to the same God.

3. Packer says that six aspects of God do not change. What are they?

(p. 77-80) Life, Character, Truth, His Ways, Purposes, and the Son.

4. Relate each of these six aspects of God to yourself and show how they demonstrate how you are different from God. (e.g., *Aspect - God - me*)

(pp. 77-80) These answers will be personal for the part that deals with me but they will have some similarities since we are all human. The God part should be similar since it is taken from Packer's text. We need to understand that biblically, all of the change should be on our part.

- **Life – God:** from everlasting to everlasting, unchanging, immutable at His core, and reliable in all things. **Me:** from beginning to...I constantly change for good or ill.
- **Character – God:** permanently good. **Me:** always deficient, needing correction, fixing—can be broken, possibly beyond repair.
- **Truth – God:** Always, God does not lie. **Me:** I always lie, especially to myself (e.g., rationalizing). I shade the truth and cast things in their best light.
- **Ways – God:** The same always: yesterday, today, and tomorrow. **Me:** I wander, constantly. Hopefully, I am improving, but sometimes it seems one step forward—two back, two forward—one back.
- **Purposes – God:** His plan is from eternity, and his purposes do not change. **Me:** I vacillate all over the place. It seems to be a joke among modern men, even those approaching retirement, "What am I going to be when I grow up." We constantly have to fight double-mindedness.
- **Son (Trinitarian nature) – God:** Hebrews 13:8 tells us about the utter reliability of Jesus the Son. **Me:** As God's adopted son (or daughter), I could be much better than I am. Thank God I am now family.

5. What is another word that explains that God's life is unchanging and immutable? Explain its meaning in your own words.

(p. 77) Though Packer does not use this in this section, for me, it is YAHWEH – God's revealed name- the God who was, is, and will be. In other words, God is always. His life is immortal and eternal, the same, never-changing touchstone of my existence, the marker and guide point I use to navigate everything. He is both my starting point and end point (Alpha & Omega). God is not mutable, while his creation is a mutable expression of his immutability.

6. How is God's character related to His immutability? Why is this aspect of His character important to us as Christians?

(p. 77-78) While many things can alter our character, nothing alters God's. Packer notes that His revealed

name is more than a label but an expression of His self-existence and eternal changelessness. As God revealed himself to Moses, the GREAT I AM revealed ([Exodus 34](#)) that He is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. He sets the pattern for our life. His love is our touchstone.

7. What does it mean that God knows his own mind? What characteristic expresses this fact? What does this characteristic of God teach you about yourself?

(p. 78-79) God is never double-minded or unstable. He never second-guesses himself. What He says, He means; what He says, He does; He never has to amend himself. He is reliable and stable.

He is truthful, and His "truth" does not change.

God's truthfulness teaches me how far I have to go; it gives me things to aspire to while always remembering that the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41). I know I will fail; however, God will not. He will catch me in His everlasting arms, correct me, and send me back to try again. How many times? As many as I need or am willing to endure. God never gives up; only I do. As long as I never give up and continue the fight, I will never completely fail; I will have temporary setbacks.

Does despair/completely giving up equal the apostasy of [Hebrews 6:4-6](#) or being locked into the wood, hay, and stubble of [1 Corinthians 3:9-15](#)? I don't know; I leave that decision to God where it belongs, but neither option is palatable to someone who wants to *know* God. My job is to keep on keeping on ([Philippians 2:12-14](#)) and while on my way to always listen to Jesus, remembering what he said to Pilate: "...Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" ([John 18:37b](#)).

8. Why is God's unchanging purpose important to living your everyday Christian life? What does it mean to you personally (e.g., see [Philippians 1:6](#))?

(p. 79-80) Two scriptures stand out: [Psalm 33:11](#), "The plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations," and [Romans 11:29](#), "The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable." God never changes his purpose, and I hold onto that. What gives me hope for the fulfillment of both those scriptures is Paul's statement in [Philippians 1:6](#), "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." We all need to be confident in God's unchanging purpose for our lives.

9. Food for thought: How does this unchanging nature of God relate to our understanding of the Trinity and how we view each person of the Godhead, especially God's Son, Jesus Christ?

(p. 80) It helps us to understand that the Trinity always was, is, and will be. That Jesus (the eternal Son) saves us and that he is never impotent or unable to be our savior. The Son was the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world ([Revelation 13:8](#)) by his own choice, submitting to the will of the Father. The eternal Son told everyone that "...before Abraham was I AM" ([John 8:58](#)) and reminded his disciples that his coming death was to redeem us from sin and was why he came into the world. ([Matthew 16:21](#), [1 Timothy 1:15](#)).

The submission of the Son to the Father is eternal and part of the nature of the relationship within the Trinity. Our need to submit to Christ (the Son) and the Father is also eternal and a fundamental part of our relationship with God.

What to Do Next

Before you read the chapter for next week, look at question 2 in Chapter 8's Concern section. After answering that, read Chapter Eight: *The Majesty of God*. Consider how Biblical figures responded to the majesty of God and then, interacting with their example, decide what your response should be.

Sometimes, it is useful to expose our understanding to ourselves and others in the group before we interact with what Packer will say. I believe that when thinking about Majesty, its meaning should be defined first for ourselves, not only when applied to God but in general. I have found that this next chapter breaks new ground for most of my students. Majesty is not something we normally think about, and most of us have a

Chapter 7: God Unchanging

tenuous, at best, grasp of its meaning and implications.

Goal: To ground ourselves in the utter reliability of God.

Armed with the truth that God does not change His mind, we can stand on His promises and be confident in His trustworthiness. Remembering that we were created in His image, think about what responsibility lies at our feet.

What lies at our feet? Our choices are to change and be like Him or hold back and try to control ourselves. It is our choice, and the choosing is a mystery held suspended between the absolute sovereignty of God, the many are called, but few are chosen, and absolute responsibility of our choice and the required judgment. The older I get, the more the question from an old charismatic song hits home: "But Jesus, why me?" The more I rely on the fact that once known of Christ, I cannot be unknown. Hallelujah!

Meditation on Chapter 7: God Unchanging

In this section, we confront the God who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, the forever immutable (not subject or susceptible to change) God, to use a nice theological term. In Section Two, Packer introduces the important attributes of God and begins with God Unchanging. Numerous Scriptures deal with our unchanging God, but I want to focus on two:

"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" ([Numbers 23:19](#))

"The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations." ([Psalm 33:11](#))

The practical issue behind the theological niceties of immutability is whether or not the God with whom we have to do is *absolutely dependable*. The pagan deities in the world surrounding the Hebrews were not. They often appeared petty, vindictive, and completely unreliable, hence the need in their religious systems to make offerings to placate or bribe them into action. This pagan necessity should not be confused with Israelite requirements to make sacrifices for sin.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (YAHWEH) is a God of covenants, of agreements, and they are as reliable as his Word.

The first Scripture, noted above, is from Numbers and says that God does not lie. He is truthful and never has to take back anything he has said. In addition, his yes is yes, and his no is no. So, when he says he will or will not do something, that is the end of the matter.

The second Scripture is taken from Psalm 33, and it assures us that when God gives us guidance or direction or tells us in his Word what we should do or not do, it is not relative or off-handed, but it will stand the test of time and eternity. God's heart, purposes, truth, etc., do not change from generation to generation, so what he has told his followers in the past applies to us here and now. When Paul tells the Corinthians ([1 Corinthians 10:11](#)) that what happened to those in the past was written down for our admonition and benefit many years later, it is because God does not change.

With this in mind, Dr. Packer wants us to grasp God's utter trustworthiness and dependability and the validity and reliability of his Holy Word. One of the ways Packer does this is by pointing out six aspects of God's nature that do not change. These include his:

- **Life** – He is from everlasting to everlasting, unchanging, immutable at His core, and reliable in everything.
- **Character** – He is permanently good.
- **Truth** – Always, God does not lie.
- **Ways** – He is the same always: yesterday, today, and tomorrow.
- **Purposes** – His plan is from eternity and his purposes do not change.
- **Son (Trinitarian nature)** – Hebrews 13:8 tells us about the utter reliability of Jesus the Son.

Meditation on Chapter 7: God Unchanging

These aspects of God are very different from what makes up who we are. Below, you see how God's aspects are contrasted with our own.

- **Life** – We are born into death, waiting to die.
- **Character** – Our character must be taught goodness.
- **Truth** – We lie.
- **Ways** – We must learn to act properly and not be pathetically inconsistent.
- **Purposes** – While God's are eternal, ours change often, sometimes daily, sometimes moment to moment.
- **and His Son** – We are the prodigals and only his sons by merciful adoption and constant forgiveness through the blood of His Son.

God is the one who means what he says, keeps his promises, and is utterly reliable, trustworthy, truthful, and dependable. Not one jot or tittle will change from what he has declared until it has achieved its eternal purpose.

God's unchangingness is essential for us to live out the Christian life since our sanctification and ultimate justification rely totally on Jesus the Son, who is the author and finisher of our faith, the one who has begun this good work in us, and will **himself** bring it to completion ([Philippians 1:6](#)). That gives us all hope, hope when we fail, when we sin and seek repentance, hope when it seems that what is arrayed against us is overwhelming, yet we still have hope. We have Jesus on our side, and he told us that while we are in his hand, he is in the Father's hand, and no one, not anyone, can take us out of the Father's hand. See [John 10:28-29](#) and [Roman's 8:31-39](#).

Without God's unchanging immutability, what would be the consequence of those promises? He could change his mind tomorrow as the Gentiles believed their pagan gods did. But no, YAHWEH our God assures us that he is reliable and that his eternal Son, our Savior, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." ([Hebrews 13:8](#)). This is the foundation for our strength to get up when we have fallen, to continue against the obstacles we face, to have hope when all around us hope is gone. We have an eternal destiny. God's gifts to us and his calling on our life are irrevocable ([Romans 11:29](#)), so we persevere to the end, sure in the hope set before us.

I pray that God will grant you both the grace and the help required in your times of need. I pray that you may always rest in the assurance of his everlasting faithfulness and eternal loving kindness to you and to all whom he has called unto himself. Grace and peace. Amen.

Chapter 8: The Majesty of God

Today's theme: God is great; God is good.

This is the first blessing I ever learned. God is great. God is good. Let us thank him for our food. Amen.

Scriptural background:

[Jude 1:25](#) "To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

Majesty goes far beyond greatness and goodness and includes dignity, glory, dominion, and power, which, even with those additions, is not enough to encompass its fullness. But it's a start.

[Romans 1:21a](#) "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him..."

We diminish God in many ways, even we who call him Father. We often try to bring him down to our size so we can better relate to him. We take his nature as Father and think that allows us more familiarity than is granted, forgetting he is also GOD. I think the hardest thing in living out our Christian life is maintaining balance in all things, especially when it relates to YAHWEH, our God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Quotes for the week

"Henceforth the majesty of God revere; Fear deep, reverent awe and respect that practically undoes us Him, and you have nothing else to fear." James Fordyce (1720-1796) *Answer to a gentleman who apologized to the author for swearing.*

This speaks to maintaining the right balance in our understanding and attitude. It reminds me of Isaiah's sense of being undone in the presence of God (Isaiah 6:5). Compared to God, everything else finds its proper place. Everything else pales before Him.

"As I was walking...and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the *glorious majesty and grace of God*, as I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction; *majesty and meekness joined together*; it was sweet and gentle, and *holy majesty*; and also a *majestic meekness*; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and *holy gentleness*." Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) quoted in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature, Volume 18*.

The key thoughts in this quote from America's greatest philosopher are italicized above. I like how Edwards ties together God's grace with his majesty, for without his grace, his majesty would undo us. From there, he goes on to note the balance: majesty-meekness and the holiness attached to both. God is not at odds with himself. He and his many attributes are always in balance, which will become a theme for this section, especially when we consider God's goodness and severity.

Concern: Will we be able to come to terms with the utter greatness of God?

We live in a time of individual exultation, the existential (personally experienced) moment. With that as a background and coupled with all that surrounds us, can we even deal with God's greatness, much less appreciate and submit to it?

Sometimes, it may seem that I overemphasize the water in which we swim, but it cannot be emphasized enough because it constantly distorts everything we see, hear, and think.

1. As a twenty-first-century person, what does the concept of majesty mean to you?

These answers will be personal. For me, it begins with overarching wonderment, like the majesty of nature at her most wild and great: tornadoes, hurricanes, thunderstorms, earthquakes, in balance with awesome sunsets, mountain vistas, running brooks with the first spring flowers breaking through the last late snow, and photographs compiled from the Hubble telescope of the wonders of the universe.

2. Before reading the chapter by Packer, how would you apply the concept of majesty to God? (I want you to see how what Packer says may change your understanding.)

This will be a personal answer. For me, God is the wonderment above all wonderments.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To learn to appreciate the majesty of God and what that means in modern terms.

When we think about God's majesty, we have to deal with how jaded our modern sensibilities have become, so that it takes a lot more to fill us with awe. Many people suffer from what Packer calls the Marie Antoinette disease: "Nothing tastes." In a sense, we have numbed our "majesty receptors" so that they fail to respond to the real thing.

1. How does this chapter's view of God differ from the common view expounded in most charismatic and evangelical churches today? Which do you think is correct and why?

(p. 83) Modern man's God is too small. His God is personal but weak, distant, ineffectual, and even pathetic. Contrary to this, Packer takes the biblical approach and reminds us that He is eternal, infinite, almighty, and has dominion over everything. He has us in His hands; we never have Him in ours; while he is our intimate Father, He is the creator of the universe and all that is. I would add that He is not our buddy, no matter what we may think.

We must balance our understanding with scriptures reminding us that The LORD is the great God. [Psalm 95:3](#)

2. Find examples of scriptures that support the personalness of God. Please include at least one reference that is not in the chapter text. Include how your choices show God's personalness. Explain how God is personal in your life.

(p. 83-85) The ones with * are not in the book. This list will be personal but could include some of the following:

Genesis 3:8-9	God walks in the garden with Adam and talks with him.
Genesis 16:8	God, through his angel, questions Hagar, who is pregnant with Ismael.
Genesis 18:20-33	Abraham and God bargain over Sodom and Gomorrah.
* Exodus 3:1-4:14	God appears to Moses in the burning bush and instructs him to go to Egypt.
* 1 Kings 19:4-18	God takes care of Elijah when he is depressed after defeating the priests of Baal.
* Jeremiah 31:33	God makes a covenant to write the law on the hearts of his people, saying he will be their God and they will be his people.
* John 3:16-21	Jesus tells Nicodemus about God's love for his creation.
* John 14:23	Jesus tells his disciples how obedience to his Word will cause the Father to love them.
* Romans 8:14-16	Paul explains that we have the Spirit of adoption as sons to God and call him "Abba! Father!" This is highly personal.

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God has spoken to me in ways I cannot ignore, some almost audible and others in an overwhelming understanding of what He wanted. I have had two visions, and both times, God told me something that was for me, directly relating to how He wanted me to live my life.

3. What biblical examples point out to you the greatness and majesty of God? What common problem should the contemplation of these scriptures remove from your life?

(p. 85-86) In [Psalm 139](#), God shows us that he knows us completely and it is impossible to escape from his presence. He is everywhere we go and sees everything, no matter how hidden. In [Job 38-41](#), God challenges Job and his counselors to consider what He has created and how it should humble them by comparison. Job's answer in [42:1-6](#) is instructive: *Then Job answered the LORD and said: "I know that you can(A) do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."* Job is overwhelmed by the greatness and majesty of God, the one with whom he must deal—not his friends—God.

Loneliness and helplessness: These and many other scriptures should help us lay aside the deep inner fear that we are alone. God is always with us; we are fearfully and wonderfully made by Him. In addition, these scriptures should continually remind us of God's unlimited wisdom, presence, and power and how he can solve any problem and deal with any situation. We may be helpless, but God is not.

4. 4. The whole of creation suffers when compared with the majesty of God, so why would we use images from creation to demonstrate God's greatness? What type of sin should this exercise prevent? How?

(p. 86-88) In thinking about [Job 38-41](#), God illustrates how nature dwarfs mankind and then caps that with how He dwarfs nature. The comparison is effective in the limited context of real knowledge in the time of Job. It works even better today. God now asks us, could you create the human genome with all its complexities and dependencies and make it work so perfectly, beginning with anything, much less a handful of dirt? He would invite us to look at the images from the Hubble telescope and ask if we could create that beautifully complex universe that we see, much less the infinite complexity that makes it all work and hold together, and imagine what kind of God it requires to hold all of that together. They move on to the complexity of our daily lives throughout history and remember that it is in him that we live and move and have our being. [Acts 17:28](#)

Isaiah reminds us, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways [God's] higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. ([Isaiah 55:9](#)) As we look at everything around us and then examine those of us who would rule and exercise power in this world, be it political, scientific, or economic power, we need to remember that they and we are dust in the wind, that God rules over us all. Though he gives us considerable freedom and responsibility, he guides even our sins to his eternal purpose. ([Genesis 50:19-21](#), Joseph and his brothers)

Pride and arrogance: accepting this reality should help keep us from these sins. It should induce humility deep in the core of our being by demonstrating in absolute terms how small and impotent we are compared to God, and the more we learn about creation, the humbler we should become. Each new advance in our knowledge shows us His creation's ever-increasing complexity and majesty. Rather than our science making God smaller, it makes Him so much more than we ever could imagine.

When men create gods for themselves or imagine themselves as gods, they are infinitely less than the God we have revealed to us. They are limited and flawed beings. Nihilistic religions (Hinduism, Buddhism) denigrate the created order and proclaim nothingness/nonbeing as individuals as the ultimate goal, attempting to sidestep the problematic questions and comparisons altogether.

We must always strive to balance who we are as created and adopted children of God and the total everythingness of the One with whom we have to do, never forgetting that he chose us and loves us beyond measure; He is our God, and we are his people.

5. What significance do the three questions of Isaiah have in your everyday Christian life? Take time to contemplate each of them and then express what your meditation tells you about yourself, God, and your relationship with him.

(p. 88-89) We need to respond to Dr. Packer's insights on what Isaiah asked of Israel and, subsequently, of us. How this is applied will be personal.

- **To whom shall we compare God; who do we think is in any way like him?** Before anything else, before we do or say anything concerning God, we first build a mental model of who He is, and from there, we make our decisions and speak our opinions. But who is this God we have imagined? Who is this being we have fashioned in our minds? Paul told the Romans that what they needed to know about God was plain to them. All they and we have to do is examine creation to see the power and divine nature of the creator, the God of heaven and earth, and all that is in it. ([Romans 1:18-22](#)) So, the problem is not the evidence; the evidence is conclusive. The problem is the heart and the a priori of being that resides at the foundation of who we are.
- **Why do we think we can do or say anything God does not know about? Do we think he has forgotten us or doesn't care about us?** Moses reminded the Israelites, "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" ([Numbers 23:19](#)) God keeps his promises; He does what he says. Jesus the Son told his disciples and us, "I will never leave you or forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5). He further told his disciples and us that we were in his hand and the Father's hand, for he and the Father are one and no one can snatch us out their hands. ([John 10:28-30](#)) We are eternally safe, and the peace of God keeps our hearts and minds in the assurance of our salvation in Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:7). We should know our final destiny; we are called to trust who we are in Christ and therefore, to trust the journey he is taking us on.
- **Do we think God is weak or impotent in any way? In our modern parlance, do we think bad things happen to good people because God can't do anything about it?** In 1981, Harold Kushner, a conservative Jewish Rabbi, published a book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, that tried to address the problem of evil and suffering by postulating that God was limited and things happened that were beyond his control. Isaiah thought differently and rebuked the Israelites and we who follow the same God, saying, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. (Isaiah 40:28). We should also remember what God said to Moses, "Has the LORD's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not." ([Numbers 11:23](#)) While we can put forward scripture after scripture that declares God's control and sovereignty over all that is, in the end it comes down to trust, trust in God, trust in his love for us, and trust that he knows what he is doing.

6. Think about how the personages in the book of Job relate to the majesty of God. Who misused and who properly understood the true nature of God's majesty? Explain.

Like Kushner, Job's friends could not believe bad things happen to good people. But, unlike Rabbi Kushner, they could not believe in an impotent God, which meant that Job had to be a sinner, i.e., not a "good person." What Elihu and Job's other friends failed to grasp was that the limits on their understanding prevented them from seeing the deep mystery behind God's choices through time and creation, e.g., they had no knowledge, as we, the readers of the Book of Job possess about the discussion between Satan and God and what God teaches us through the events of Job's life. The central premise of Job is his statement to his wife in [Chapter 1](#), "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this, Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong." In [2:10b](#), he further says, ". Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" Even with his trust in God and acceptance of what was happening, even Job did not understand why God was doing what he was doing. As God revealed his majesty, Job's response to this growing understanding was basically, "Well, shut my mouth." In the end, Job admits that faith and trust do not need the answer if, for his purposes, God keeps it to himself. That is radically different from our often sinful need or demand to

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know.

7. Why is understanding this distinction from Job important to living a successful, humble, Christian life?

In reminding us of our limited understanding concerning God's reasons and purposes behind his choices and actions, we are left with either humble acceptance of what we cannot avoid, trusting in God's love and eternal concern for us, or rebelling and rejecting God by either pushing him away in anger over our plight, like Job's wife, or remaking him, like Rabbi Kushner, into someone who still loves us but is impotent to help us fully. Accepting our situation and maintaining our trust in God requires radical humility since the situation we are confronted with will graphically remind us that we do not understand what is going on—God's wisdom and purposes are beyond us. However, we have revelation; God has revealed what he wants us to know about him, and he expects us to know that to the uttermost. This is why Paul enjoined Timothy to study to show himself approved. We must learn to accept what God has revealed and be satisfied with whatever that is.

We must remember that while the journey is immediately in our face, it is the destination that matters in the end, so once we get on the road to knowing what God *has* revealed about himself and what he expects of us. We have made our lives responsible to/for that knowledge, then maybe what we don't know won't matter so much. Maybe we will leave Job's wife behind, leave his friends behind, and become like Job, knowing that our redeemer lives and we can trust him, no matter what.

So, what do we say to all of this? Do not lose your faith in or trust in God!

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Nine: *God Only Wise*. Think about the source of wisdom. Is it something we discover (it already "exists") or something we create for ourselves? That answer should give the title of this chapter additional weight.

Wisdom is a tenuous thing to grasp. What is it; where does it come from; when do you have it? In a sense, it is both something that already exists and something we try to apprehend for ourselves. A common definition is "the ability to think and act utilizing knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, and insight." Knowledge, understanding, insight, and experience are things we discover. They are not wisdom.

The Bible looks at wisdom primarily as coming from God, either as the work of the Spirit (the Spirit of Wisdom) or a gift from God (re: Solomon). Job asks ([Job 28:12-20](#))

But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Man does not know its worth,
and it is not found in the land of the living.
The deep says, 'It is not in me,'
and the sea says, 'It is not with me.'
It cannot be bought for gold,
and silver cannot be weighed as its price.
It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx or sapphire.
Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.
No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;
the price of wisdom is above pearls.
The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
nor can it be valued in pure gold.
From where, then, does wisdom come?
And where is the place of understanding?

We spend money and time to educate ourselves, to get information and hopefully understanding, but wisdom, Job says ([28:23](#)), wisdom is in God's hands: "God understands the way to it, and he knows its place." Finally, by chapter [40: 3-5](#), Job learns the beginning of wisdom:

Then Job answered the LORD and said:
"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but I will proceed no further."

Job says, "Shut my mouth," and learns that the beginning of wisdom is to be quiet and give reverence to God, trusting him in all things, submitting to not knowing what God does not reveal to us. The demand to know goes directly against the need to demonstrate faith and trust in God.

Goal: To understand God using aesthetics (the nature and expression of beauty) in addition to using our reason.

The Psalmist reminds us, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." (Psalm 19:1). In our attempt to "study to show ourselves approved," we sometimes forget that the beauty and majesty of God, are on display all around us. Think back and remember how you felt about this aspect of God when you were first saved. This week, try to recapture your appreciation of this aspect of God's nature.

While it is true that Satan rules the kingdoms of this earth ([Matthew 4:8-9](#)), the earth and the physical creation are the LORD's, and even though it has been (for a time) subjected to futility ([Romans 8:19-21](#)), its majesty still reveals God's glory and power ([Romans 1:19-20](#)).

Meditation on Chapter 8: The Majesty of God

In the last lesson, we began examining the attributes of God by exploring his immutability [not subject or susceptible to change]. That seldom-discussed attribute forms the bedrock foundation of our understanding of God since it makes all of His other attributes eternally consistent. It also makes God completely dependable, so utterly reliable that we can have unremitting confidence in his trustworthiness. Because of his immutability, we know that he will keep every last promise he has made to us, both corporate and personal, including the most important promise of all: our everlasting salvation in Jesus Christ.

Thus, having secured the base of our understanding of God, we now look at the crown of that understanding: God's majesty. Of all of God's attributes that Packer addresses in his book, this is the one that most of the people that I have studied with have the hardest time grasping. Part of the problem lies in the word itself; just what is majesty? It is not a word found in common usage, and historically, it is a word associated with things belonging to a monarchy rather than the republics or democracies to which moderns relate. Outside of its use in royal contexts, majesty finds almost all of its usage within a Christian framework. The only place Americans come in contact with the word is in the lyrics to America the Beautiful and the line "For purple mountain majesties." The song's most famous version is the one sung by [Ray Charles](#).

However, majesty gets its fullest meaning when the word is applied to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Packer notes in this chapter's beginning sentence that the word comes from Latin, meaning greatness. Yes, the mountains are great. Royalty is supposed to be great, but the greatest of all greatness resides in God himself. The famous American preacher and philosopher Jonathan Edwards expressed the overwhelming sense of God's majesty that he experienced one day while out walking.

"As I was walking...and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, as I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction; majesty and meekness joined together; it was sweet, and gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness." Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) quoted in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature* in 18 Volumes.

In the past, I have asked those studying this book with me to answer this question before reading this chapter: "If

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I asked you to apply the concept of majesty to God, what would you say it could tell you about God?" The answers cluster around words like great, awe-inspiring, and overwhelming. Indeed, I would agree that seeing God in all his glory and majesty would be overwhelming. In [Exodus 33](#), Moses asked to see that very thing, but God had to hide him in the cleft of a rock and cover him with his hand as his glory passed by to preserve Moses from the destruction his overwhelming majesty would cause.

"...you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen." [Exodus 33: 20-33](#) ESV

Most of the uses of majesty in the Bible are grouped in the Psalms and the words of the prophet Isaiah. For example:

"...the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel." Psalm 68:34

"The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty." Psalm 93:1

"...you are clothed with splendor and majesty." Psalm 104:1

"Arrayed in holy majesty..." Psalm 110:3

"On the glorious splendor of your majesty...I will meditate." Psalm 145:5

"...hide in the ground from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty!" Isaiah 2:10

"They will flee...from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth." Isaiah 2:21

"They raise their voices, they shout for joy; from the west they acclaim the LORD's majesty." Isaiah 24:14

In contrast to these expressions of God's majesty, his Son, the Messiah of Israel, would appear common in his manhood.

"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." Isaiah 53:2

This biblical use of majesty is in direct contrast to God's accessibility as our heavenly Father, our *abba*, as expressed by Jesus in the Lord's Prayer. This is important since God's majesty helps to balance our tendency to get a little too familiar, almost casual, in our approach to God. I believe Packer effectively deals with that issue in this chapter.

However, I often find myself investigating God's majesty in a new way. I sometimes go in a direction that Packer had not followed. Let me explain, but first, let me say that I put this idea forward as a personal observation only, not as a condemnation of or demand upon anyone, including any church or denomination. Please keep that caveat in mind.

Much of what I see as I view the world around me, including the world of my faith, which I see symbolically. I see and think in images, and I have longed to believe that much of what God says directly to our hearts is said symbolically, whether in nature, in his Word, or in the worship he gave to Israel. One of my foci in the last several years has been on worship, so when I look at the worship of Israel, I see many of the things that were done and the cultic elements used within worship as heavily symbolic. When we move into the age of the Church, I see that symbolism carried over into the historic Christian liturgy. In addition to its obvious scriptural and sacramental aspects, the Church's historic liturgy is filled with symbolism.

One of the things that I have always liked about liturgy is its sense of propriety, decency, and order to use Paul's phraseology and how it imparts a sense of God's majesty. I see much of this propriety and majesty communicated through the symbolism contained in the liturgy, including such mundane things as the congregational positions of standing, sitting, kneeling, and bowing, depending on what is happening in the service. Everything means something much more than is casually obvious.

Having once been a member of an evangelical, charismatic Episcopal Church, I always felt that I had the best of

Meditation on Chapter 8: The Majesty of God

all possible worlds: good preaching, good worship, and good liturgy, which helped me to maintain a balanced sense of who God was and how I related to him, including an abiding sense of the holy. I have always missed this when attending Anabaptist and Presbyterian-style worship and, honestly, in their rather mundane, almost cafeteria-style communion services. From my perspective, these non-liturgical traditions leave the problem of balancing my interaction with God primarily on my shoulders, with very little, if any, help imbued into the community's shared worship.

So, at least for me, God's majesty is also directly linked to my sense of worship, the historic Christian liturgy, and the proper balance between God as my Abba Father and God as King and Lord of all that was and is and is to come. I know this goes beyond chapter eight in *Knowing God*, but I felt it was important to share it with you.

Chapter 9: God Only Wise

Today's theme: The wisdom of God is wisdom indeed!

We briefly looked at wisdom in our *What's Next* segment of the last lesson. With Job to guide us, we began exploring the fundamental nature and source of wisdom. In this chapter, we jump in with both feet. However, looking at this chapter's title begs another question. Why? Why is God only wise? For me, the answer is sin. All of our wisdom is tainted by sin. That doesn't mean we can't apprehend truth; [Romans 1](#) demands that we do just that using what we can glean from creation itself. However, sin will distort everything. Our judgment, and as a result, our wisdom, is compromised to its very core. The scales of decision have a serious tare (something that throws a scale off of zero), and we can never fully grasp the correct value to use as an offset since the value is always changing, always throwing even our best efforts out of balance. That is why, even for believers, Paul says we see through a mirror darkly. ([1 Corinthians 13:12](#)). At best, we can only get part of the picture when our sin influences our attempts to fill in the gaps and how we interpret the whole. With that in mind, let's humbly approach this chapter.

Scriptural background: [Romans 11:33](#) "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!"

One important part of wisdom is realizing what you don't or can't know and resisting the temptation to "fill in the blanks."

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom, and with all your getting, get understanding." [Proverbs 4:7](#)

Proverbs places wisdom on the highest possible pedestal, arguing that its cost is never too high, even if it costs you everything. I know it appears contradictory: on the one hand, saying only God is wise, and on the other hand, telling us to get wisdom. However, if we remove the absolute from our pursuit and consider, we can, at best, get only limited wisdom, which, taken in context, we need. Without wisdom, how can we even hope to "study to show ourselves approved" (2 Timothy 2:15)? Then it isn't quite as confusing as it first appears.

Quotes for the week

"Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom." Thomas Jefferson. [He who lies to himself can never hope to be wise. Without scrupulous honesty, delusion is a constant companion.](#)

"It requires wisdom to understand wisdom: the music is nothing if the audience is deaf." Walter Lippman. [While sounding circular, I take this to mean that wisdom grows from a small seed that continues to support itself as long as you don't allow yourself to embrace deafness \(refusing to hear the truth and tainting everything from that point on. We all go off the rails at some point. The key to dealing with that failure is repentance and letting honest correction have its way with our understanding. Pig-headed people eventually fall on their faces.](#)

"Wisdom has its root in goodness, not goodness its root in wisdom." Ralph Waldo Emerson. [A right heart precedes wisdom, not the other way around. That is why anything more than simple truth is spiritually discerned. \(\[1 Corinthians 2:14\]\(#\)\)](#)

"Be very slow to believe that you are wiser than all others; it is a fatal but common error. Where one has been saved by a true estimation of another's weakness, thousands have been destroyed by a false appreciation of their own strength;" [and, see next] [Fatal but common error. Remember that. Paul says it succinctly: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." \(\[1 Corinthians 10:12\]\(#\)\) Pride has brought the fall of so many Christians, significant and important Christians, that success in ministry could be seen as a curse. At the very least, it is a serious temptation few overcome.](#)

"There is the difference between happiness and wisdom that he that thinks himself the happiest man really is so, but he that thinks himself the wisest is generally the greatest fool." Charles C. Colton (English author and clergyman; 1780-1832). [Happiness is a feeling; if you feel good and happy, you are. Wisdom is a fluid](#)

Concern: That we will not recognize that to be truly wise, we must seek the wisdom of God, wisdom that only He can provide

state of the honest spiritual apprehension of God through the power of the Holy Spirit, where we let humility reign supreme. As such, thinking we have arrived shows us we haven't, but instead, have lost what we thought we had grasped. It has flowed through our fingers and is gone. Rather than wise, we have become a fool, for we let go of the precious to embrace an illusion.

Concern: That we will not recognize that to be truly wise, we must seek the wisdom of God, wisdom that only He can provide

Without God, we have no hope of real wisdom. Only He grants it, and only the humble heart can apprehend it when he does. Consider Job's response when God confronts him over his puny understanding and monumental lack of wisdom. He demonstrates total humility. **Note:** Job was wise about some things, so he accepted whatever God sent his way as God's right and not necessarily related to any sin his friends told him he had committed. God is sovereign and not constrained by even our righteousness. Job bowed his knee to God's will and was wise in this.

1. How do *you* define wisdom? Forget the dictionary; use a practical definition but in your own words.

This answer will be personal. My definition is "knowing what is and then how to choose the right/proper/truest choice and finally just doing it." A man who knows in his mind is not wise if he cannot agree in his heart and act in his life. I always felt sorry for Solomon because though he was the wisest man who ever lived, he was also someone to be pitied because that wisdom did not bring him closer to God but instead brought him closer to despair. He made *so many* wrong choices. Much of the wisdom he had in his mind (especially in later years) did not translate into actions in his life.

2. Explain the difference between wisdom and understanding in your own words. Why is this difference significant?

Understanding knows what the issues are, while wisdom knows what to do about them. That transition separates the truly godly from the ungodly or the godly pretenders, just as it separates the world's wisdom from the wisdom of God.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To apprehend the wisdom of God for our own, but not by following the route of Adam and Eve. We know that if God is wise, we can find comfort in His counsel and instruction. God's wisdom is at the root of our ability to accept his decrees and follow His direction for our lives.

Adam and Eve attempted to seize wisdom by their own might/action, costing them everything. We must trust that what we need to know God will supply if we accept whatever he gives us. Adam and Job had similar nexus points. Adam stepped over the line and demanded to have the wisdom. In essence, job stepped back and said, "Shut my mouth," and was willing only to know what God said he could know. Remember, Job never understood why he went through what he did, but it didn't matter. He trusted God and, in doing so, became very wise.

"And to man, He said, `Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.'" [Job 28:28](#) This is a powerful insight. Fear of the Lord is knowing *and* accepting your place. Turning from evil and its temptations of false wisdom and false knowing is real wisdom.

1. According to Packer, why would God be considered truly wise?

(p. 90-91) True wisdom has both a moral and intellectual component. It could be called righteous intelligence, and as Packer says, it is the "power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it."

I like Packer's statement that wisdom is the "practical side of moral goodness." God is naturally wise. It is the sum of his attributes and moral goodness. This wisdom cannot be frustrated or, as Packer says, "Omniscience governing omnipotence, infinite power ruled by infinite wisdom" or the "biblical description of

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the divine character.”

I think it is very important how he argues that wisdom cannot be separated from character, while knowledge makes its bed anywhere. Think about that.

2. According to Packer, many people struggle to recognize God's wisdom. Why? Do you have that problem? Explain why or why not.

(p. 91-92) We have a problem seeing God's full intention, the end of his actions, so we misunderstand God's wisdom and pervert it to our own ends, or when our interpretation fails, we assume God has failed or doesn't care about us or doesn't exist.

We forget that God's truest purpose is our redemption, and everything works to that end so that we will be able to fulfill our destiny: to love, honor, and praise God to the uttermost. Until, as [Romans 8](#) reminds us, the Sons of God have been revealed, the futility of creation and our lives within it will not be redeemed; it will not make sense to us.

I have problems all the time recognizing God's wisdom. It is the basis of the question, "Why? Why me? Why this? Why not that?" For me, it goes back to acceptance that just like Job, there will be things in my life that I will never know why. I can ask, but, like Job, I can never demand to know. Ultimately, I must say, "Shut my mouth," and accept whatever God decides. That is where the rubber meets the road and so many Christians fall short.

3. What lesson did God succeed in teaching Abraham that was the basis of his becoming a wise man? How is that lesson important to you?

(p.92-94) God taught Abram how to live in his presence, seeing everything in relation to God. That changes everything and adds an important dignity to our journey, no matter what happens. Remember, despite all the promises God made to him, all Abraham ever owned was his grave. Despite that, he was willing to give up his son, the most important thing in his life, because he trusted God with an absolute trust.

For me, this is a significant lesson in perspective. We become wise like Abraham when we can see things from God's point of view, not ours, and we accept that HIS perspective is right, no matter how hard it is for us or what sacrifice He may demand.

4. How are wisdom and real-life events often intertwined? Think of the examples of Jacob and Joseph that Packer uses and how they relate to you.

(p. 94-97) God uses the real events of our lives to teach us and lead us to wisdom if we let them. Jacob was a schemer who learned what it was like to be schemed. The events leading up to his laming by God taught him that his wits and schemes could not save him, and he had a "perpetual reminder" of his need for God. Only when he was weak and in need did God bless him (a hard lesson we may need to learn ourselves).

Joseph went from his father's favorite to wrongful imprisonment. Along the way, he was "tested, refined, and matured" by events that, on the surface, appeared designed to destroy him. Instead, out of the fire came a deep charity that has shone like gold across the many centuries since he triumphed over his circumstances.

In both men's lives, God used what, on one level, was meant for evil to bring about a great good. Our lives are shot through with dual purposes, which, in the end, God shows to be in service of his divine plan. We should remember that the only difference between us, Jacob, and Joseph is a matter of scale during difficult times. God works the same way in us all, *to will and to do his good pleasure.* ([Philippians 2:13](#))

5. Why is the story of Joseph so important to understanding how God's wisdom is to be trusted? Can you think of a specific example of how this particular Biblical example applies practically to your life? Explain.

(p. 96-97) The second half of this question will be entirely personal. As to the first part, Joseph shows that events have many levels that are often not apparent to us and that God is always working things out for the best, even though that may require severe sacrifice on our part. The paradox lost on so many of us who

grew up hearing the prosperity teachings that followed the Charismatic renewal is that though we are indeed “King’s Kids,” that means the same thing it did for Jesus, the author and finisher of our salvation. What lies in front of us is the cross and all that it means. It cannot be avoided except by forfeiting the growth into the fullness of Christ that our adoption as children of God has offered us.

Are we willing to embrace the trial, like Joseph (think also about Job), and come out the other side, whether or not we get the blessings in this life? Underneath it all is the question: where do we want to deposit our riches? Read again [Matthew 6:19-34](#) and make your choice.

6. Beginning with the section *Our Perplexing Trials*, Packer gives us biblical examples of God's wisdom in the lives of His saints. Using these as examples, explain how you see God's wisdom in your life today. These should differ from the Joseph example you used in answering question 5.

(p. 97-98) Responses to this question are also very personal. The examples Packer uses are:

- **Job’s afflictions.** It is interesting to remember that during his lifetime, Job never understood the purpose of his suffering. Ultimately, he had to trust God without knowing why he suffered.
- **Paul’s afflictions.** On the other hand, Paul had some insight into his difficulties—that his afflictions would help keep him humble.

Both men suffered for God’s purpose. One knew why, and the other didn’t, and we could be in either situation or, over time, in both. It matters not. What matters is how we respond. Do we, like Job, accept not knowing or, like Paul, bend our knees to accept the necessary affliction, or do we shrink back from the fire, the annealing process [how metal is made stronger] of our faith? So many come to this decision point in their lives and rail against God.

7. Why are these biblical models or examples of God's wisdom in action important to us as Christians today, two to three thousand years after they happened?

The answer is inferred from what you have learned. [Hebrews 13:8](#) assures us that Jesus, the Eternal Son, “is the same yesterday and today and forever.” In [Malachi 3:6a](#), the Father says, “For I the LORD do not change...” Remember, we have already looked at the immutability of God (review Chapter 7 if necessary). God’s purposes, love for us, and how He works in our lives do not change. How we specifically fit into his plan is different for each of us and possibly different during the various stages of our lives. We also need to remember Paul’s admonition in [Romans 15:4](#) “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Remember, we are human—we are all the same; our fallen human nature does not change; we are *not evolving* into a better version of homo sapiens. There is only one thing that changes us, being born again into the new creation of God.

8. Why are your examples of God's wisdom working in your life important to your fellow travelers and your fellow believers in their journey? Think about the importance of testimony in the life and mission of the Church.

The answer is inferred from what you have learned. It ennobles our efforts because we are not alone in our journey. What happens to us is part of the larger plan, and we are part of the grand caravan, the untold numbers of saints who have gone before and shared our present journey. It builds the hope within us.

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Ten: *God’s Wisdom and Ours*. Consider the difference between the two, and then, since we are made in the image of God, why is there a difference? Finally, following Packer’s lead, think about what we must learn to change our wisdom into God’s.

Life, especially the Christian life, is full of mysteries. That makes most of us very uncomfortable. We want answers; we want to know. It goes back to the original sin where Satan told Eve she could know what God said she was not to know. There is embedded in all of us, in our fallenness, this sense that we have a *right*

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to know whatever we want to know (it seems these days everything we want is a right). However, part of God's inexpressible wisdom is that there are many things we should not know, things that test our trust, our faith, and our hope that God truly cares for us. From my perspective, one of the chief aspects of true human wisdom (forever separate from divine wisdom) is understanding and accepting our limits. That does not mean we cannot ask. Job asked—asked hard. But it does mean knowing when to stop and when to accept that God has said no and not to push any further. That is very hard to do, and failing this test is the source of so many human problems, not the least of which is heresy.

We have to learn to embrace the mystery and let God be God. Let me give you a relevant example. Instead of saying that it must be either God's absolute sovereignty or man's free choice, we need to accept the mystery and the wisdom that both are completely true and cannot be reconciled by our limited reason in the same way that the fact the Jesus is both absolutely and completely human and absolutely and completely the divine Son, God, the Second Person of the Eternal Trinity is true.

Knowing when to accept the limits, when to push on, and then bend the knee to the right decision is the foundation of real wisdom. No man is wise who steps beyond the bounds God has proscribed [set limits around].

Goal: To begin trusting our daily decisions and lives to God's wisdom.

Learning from Biblical figures such as Joseph and Paul, we too should strive to see and trust the wisdom of God in every situation in life, just as they did. This week, I want you to take some time each night to review the course of your day. Evaluate your progress and growth in trusting God and his wisdom that day. Do not be discouraged; always remember this is a lifelong journey.

The hardest thing to learn, at least it has been for me, is to keep immediate events in proper balance and to remember that what looks overwhelming at the moment may prove to be a lot less significant in the long run. Conversely, something that looks almost insignificant now may be life-altering, as the effects of a simple choice or event ripple out through time and space. [James 4:13-16](#) reminds us that we have limited control over what happens.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears briefly and then vanishes. Instead, you should say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

We easily forget that everything depends on "If the Lord wills." That especially includes the things that seem arbitrary and unfair. Imagine how Joseph felt as the slave caravan made its way to Egypt. It was not until the **end** of the story that Joseph understood God's purpose, and his faithfulness was validated ([Exodus 45:4-9](#)).

"So Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come near me, please.' And they came near. And he said, 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for **God sent me before you** to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And **God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth**, and to keep alive for you many survivors. **So it was not you who sent me here, but God.** He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.'" [**Emphasis added.**]

Meditation on Chapter 9: God Only Wise

As we continue our study, we progress from God's eternal and glorious majesty to this week's examination of the LORD's deep and abiding wisdom. Indeed, Packer makes the claim that only God is truly wise. That statement is powerful, especially in our post-modern, secular scientific age. I think two quotes from Thomas Jefferson are apropos here:

- Honesty is the first chapter in the book of Wisdom.

- In Great Britain, it is said that their constitution relies on the House of Commons for honesty and the Lords for wisdom, which would be a rational reliance if honesty were to be bought with money and if wisdom were hereditary.

So, to be wise, we must first be honest, but honesty is not for sale, and wisdom can't be inherited. Emerson had an idea of where wisdom might come from.

Wisdom has its root in goodness, *not goodness its root in wisdom*. [*Emphasis added.*] Ralph Waldo Emerson.

So, Emerson believed that to be wise, you must first be good since bad men will delude themselves into thinking they are wise, and only a good man will honestly separate wisdom from folly. This aligns with the biblical concept that wisdom has a moral and intellectual component. However, Walter Lippman, the founding editor of The New Republic, identified another problem.

Understanding wisdom requires wisdom: the music is nothing if the audience is deaf.

This feeds nicely into Paul's biblical argument in [1 Corinthians 1:18-24](#).

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the wise one? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

From this, we learn that Christ is the wisdom of God, which is why he is foolish to those who are perishing, the natural man, but in those who have received salvation, who have the Spirit of Christ in them, the wisdom of God is made real. They have solved Lippman's dilemma. At least they have begun to.

But it can also be seen that the reality of life is that there must be a transition from the old man to the new, an ongoing growth in maturity in the Lord. Packer uses several Old Testament saints as examples of the growth and maturity that occurs over time due to encounters with God. He uses Abram, who became, after as many failures as successes, Abraham, the father of Israel; Jacob, who went from a practitioner of deception to the Patriarch of Israel; and Joseph, who went from condemned slave to vizier over all of Egypt, saving the future Israel from a devastating famine.

Packer also corrects a common misconception about wisdom, that being wise means avoiding all problems and living a happy and carefree life.

(p. 101-102) But this idea of God's intention is a complete mistake. God's wisdom is not, and never was, pledged to keep a fallen world happy, or to make ungodliness comfortable. Not even to Christians has he promised a trouble-free life; rather the reverse. He has other ends in view for life in this world than simply to make it easy for everyone.

What is he after, then? What is his goal? What does he aim at?...His ultimate objective is to bring them to a state in which they please him entirely and praise him adequately, a state in which he is all in all to them, and he and they rejoice continually in the knowledge of each other's love – people rejoicing in the saving love of God, set upon them from all eternity, and God rejoicing in the responsive love of people, drawn out of them by grace through the gospel.

As Christians, we must accept and understand that trials and tribulations are a normal part of our lives in this fallen world. Suffering is normative, so much so that even Jesus himself “learned obedience through what he suffered...being made perfect...” ([Hebrews 5:8-9](#)) With that in mind, how should we, who are called to follow in his footsteps, expect anything less?

In the end, gaining wisdom means gaining a deep trust in God our Father and believing not only that his grace is

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sufficient for whatever needs we have but that no matter what happens, it cannot separate us from His everlasting love.

“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know...we know that for those who love God all things work together for good...What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Selections from [Romans 8:26-39](#))

As you continue your study in *Knowing God*, may you grow in grace and wisdom, and may the peace that passes all understanding guard your heart and mind in the knowledge of your salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord, to the praise and glory of His Name. Amen.

Meditation on Chapter 9: God Only Wise

Chapter 10: God's Wisdom and Ours

Today's theme: After salvation, wisdom is God's greatest gift.

Do you believe this is true? Solomon did. The Bible argues, and I love how the King James Bible phrases it in Proverbs 4:7: "Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore, get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding." With all thy getting...I guess that means trying as hard as you can. This was David's advice to his son, and it is the best advice one could give.

We live in a world with an ever-increasing amount of knowledge. We know so much about so many things, but we have so little wisdom to make that knowledge enrich our lives. Why? The short answer is sin. It distorts everything, corrupting our understanding and denuding our wisdom.

Therefore, as a Christian, God's greatest gift to you is knowing what to do with what you have learned and becoming wise. Go back briefly to Chapter 2 and look over the concern where we examined the differences between the Greek and Hebrew approaches to knowledge. The wisdom God offers us carries with it the Hebrew demand of responsibility—knowing and being wise *requires us to act accordingly*. That is the really hard part about this chapter.

Scriptural background: [Proverbs 4:5-9](#) "Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor."

Wisdom is supreme (the highest possible thing). Solomon says she (wisdom) is worth everything you own. I find it significant that wisdom is considered feminine (not female—there is a significant difference). As a feminine attribute, wisdom responds; it does not initiate. It responds to a need, shows how to react, examines what it knows, and answers with guidance.

Notice how wisdom responds in the proverb above: exaltation to your esteeming of her, honor to your embrace of her. Wisdom responds, and she is a unique gift from God. She will not do your work for you but help you wisely complete what you are laboring on. She is not aggressive and cannot be aggressively laid hold of. She, like God [sometimes God, wisdom always], comes in a still small voice that we must be quiet to hear. This is a very important point that I want you to remember forever.

Quotes for the week

"Wisdom is oft times nearer when we stoop than when we soar." William Wordsworth. *The Complete Poetical Works, The Excursion, Book Third: Despondency*, 1888.

Wordsworth makes my previous point. Humility is the home where wisdom chooses to live. Humility quiets the mind and heart so wisdom can be heard.

"Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers." Alfred Lord Tennyson. "Locksley Hall," Line 141.

After you have forgotten most of the facts and information you once knew, wisdom will still guide you. You can always find out the important facts.

"Not by years but by disposition is wisdom acquired." Plautus (254-184 B.C.). *Trinummus*. Act II, Scene 2, line 88.

Plautus gives advice similar to Wordsworth without being specific about humility. We wrongly think that wisdom depends on time when the deciding factor is the proper disposition, attitude, or reverence in which humility is allowed to govern.

Concern: We will fail to see that we are truly wise only when we learn from God what he wishes to teach us

Concern: We will fail to see that we are truly wise *only* when we learn from God what he wishes to teach us

We are dependent on God for our wisdom. Moses told the Israelites in [Deuteronomy 29:4](#), "But to this day, the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear." We cannot apprehend the wisdom God has to offer unless we listen to Him. Paul warned the Corinthians ([1 Corinthians 2:14](#)), "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." We may think we are wise and smart without God, but Paul said otherwise ([1 Corinthians 3:18-20](#)), "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness" and again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

"The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor." [Proverbs 15:33](#)

Fear does one very important thing; it strips away arrogance and self-conceit and allows humility to be embraced.

1. Is wisdom lacking in our modern world? Why, or why not? Give an example.

There is no right answer here. The question seeks an opinion supported by evidence. I would argue that wisdom, which requires quiet humility to express itself, is drowned out in our raucous world, ruled by the opinion of the mob. Democracy eventually degenerates into a mob where the loudest and most emotionally satisfying voices hold sway. That has nothing to do with wisdom. (See [The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind](#) by Gustave Le Bon) For those of you who will read Ann Coulter, her book [Demonic: How the Liberal Mob Is Endangering America](#) addresses a similar issue (though in a harsh manner for some) and uses Le Bon as a resource.

2. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools [the morally deficient] despise wisdom and discipline." [Proverbs 1:7](#)

This passage ties wisdom to morality in a way that goes against our modern arguments that separate immoral behavior from any connection to good judgment, especially concerning politicians. The Bible argues that a person's "private life" is intimately connected with their ability to be wise.

How do you think fear is related to wisdom?

As I noted earlier, fear can strip away the arrogance and self-conceit that prevent a person from becoming wise. Fear of the Lord puts us in our proper place in the scheme of things. It enables the humble balance in one's life, which is necessary to let wisdom speak to us in that small, quiet voice that I believe wisdom uses.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: If God desires to give us wisdom, we must understand how to gain this important gift from our heavenly Father.

As Christians, we begin believing that God wants to give us the wisdom we need to become what He has destined us to be. The "if" statement above is rhetorical, not a true question because God does desire to give us wisdom.

"Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor." [Proverbs 3:13-16](#)

We all want to be blessed, but apparently, wisdom must be found; it doesn't come looking for you. Consider what this means concerning classic NT passages such as [2 Timothy 2:15](#): "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Chapter 10: God's Wisdom and Ours

1. How does Packer define "God made man in his image" ([Gen 1:26-27](#))? What relation does that have to God's *communicable* attributes?

(p. 99-100) Using reformed categories of understanding, Packer argues that we share with God his communicable attributes. We were created as free spiritual beings and responsible moral agents who could choose and act voluntarily. We were able to commune with God and were by nature holy. We lost much of that in the fall and now possess only a defaced image of God. However, in God's plan of redemption, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, God restored to us a measure of those attributes (the first fruits of our salvation as empowered by the Holy Spirit) in this life and promised a complete restoration and even more in the resurrection.

2. Why is "being renewed in the image of Christ and God" important? ([2 Cor 3:18](#), [Col 3:10](#)) What relation does this have to our original creation?

(p. 100) The defaced image of God that was part of our original creation is being repaired (part of the work of sanctification) and renewed. The redeemed are regaining a portion of what was lost in the fall. It is important to note the tense (being renewed), which is the present participle and means we are involved in a constant ongoing renewal.

This can be contrasted with our original creation, which was complete at the moment of creation, not a process that worked out over time, as seen in our renewed image.

3. Why is wisdom (Godly wisdom is assumed here) so important to the follower of God? Be specific.

(p.100-101) Proverbs tells us that in wisdom, there is life and favor from the LORD (Yahweh) and that if we fail to find it, we harm ourselves. ([Proverbs 8:33-34](#)) Therefore, it is safe to say that wisdom forms the foundation of our life and favor in the LORD.

It is necessary for Christians because we need it to know God's will for our life and actions: "Live—not as unwise but as wise...Do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is" ([Ephesians 5:15-17](#)) and "to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." ([Colossians 1:9](#)). With this in mind we should never forget that God is willing to give us the wisdom we need if we ask Him for it. ([James 1:5](#)).

4. According to the Bible, what are the two prerequisites to gaining Godly wisdom?

(p. 101-102) Packer presents two basic prerequisites to gaining Godly wisdom:

- **Reverence for God**—"Fear of the Lord [reverence for God] is the beginning of wisdom" ([Proverbs 1:7](#), [Proverbs 9:10](#), [Proverbs 15:33](#), [Psalm 111:10](#)) Each of these scriptures emphasizes a different aspect of fear of the Lord: not to fear God means we are fools, fearing God is the path to true knowledge of God, and fear of the Lord is our instructor in wisdom because there is an order to things and humility must come first.

Packer closes with a major concern that many Christians are too proud and conceited to ever gain any wisdom from God. While they may be saved, they will have frittered their lives away, ending their time by experiencing Paul's admonition from 1 Corinthians 3:15, where God's cleansing fire burns everything away, leaving them with nothing but their salvation. I like the way the Amplified Bible says the passage.

But if any person's work is burned up [under the test], he will suffer the loss [of it all, losing his reward], though he himself will be saved, but only as [one who has passed] through fire.

It gives the picture of someone coming out of a fire, smoking and naked, without even the clothes on their back.

- **Willingness to receive from God**—God does not force wisdom upon us; we must work for it. Throughout the Old Testament, those who study (meditate on) God's law (statutes/Word) become wise. Paul carries this forward to the Christian when he tells the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in

you richly...with all wisdom." ([Colossians 3:16](#)) In his instruction to Timothy, he admonishes him that "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#))

Packer again expresses his concern about the modern Christian, arguing that they never become wise because they have so little knowledge of the Scriptures. We are fools and remain fools all our lives, he laments, because we spend so much time on entertainment (when he wrote this in the '70s with newspapers, today with television, the Internet, games, and as fans of various sports) and leave God and his Word as an afterthought.

5. Why is it important to know what wisdom is not?

(p. 102-103) As Packer warns, Christians may make the mistake of believing that because they have some understanding of the providential meaning and purpose of events, understanding something about what God has done, is doing, or will do next in a particular case, they have special godly wisdom. When they become baffled about what God is doing, they feel they have lost their spiritual closeness to God and are no longer wise. Packer, in essence, warns against expecting Godly wisdom to be a form of spiritual divination where we discern God's purpose from every little thing that happens.

Scripture and the lives of both Old and New Testament saints make it evident that God's wisdom concerning his will is usually painted with a broad brush (His general will or direction for us versus His particular will at a given moment), with moments of singular clarity concerning a particular item coming only as special occurrences.

In my experience, coming from both a Pentecostal and Charismatic background, there is a profound difference between being open and expecting God's spiritual leading so that we can respond to it when it occurs (which is often just being and doing what is expected of us as a Christian, not some unique guidance) and walking around expecting God to reveal everything like an active roadmap overlaid on the events in front of us anytime we desire it.

We need to remember Job. Sometimes, we will know, and sometimes, we will not know the why and wherefore. In the end, real godly wisdom is our ability to settle into the peace that passes understanding ([Philippians 4:7](#)), trust God when we don't know, and have the courage and perseverance to do what God demands when we know what to do. Sometimes, knowing what God wants is a really hard road, especially when that knowing is that we must accept we have reached the limit to what we can know and we will not learn anything further, no matter how much we want to (aka Job's paradox). This is where wisdom and humility meet in the heart of the Christian.

6. In section three, Packer will discuss what kind of gift wisdom is. For now, what single word or phrase would you use to describe God's gift of wisdom using the information from this section? Explain your answer. How does that relate to our life today, where you currently live?

(p. 103-104) It is possible to get several different answers here since the question is personal. However, the "Explain your answer" requirement should make the choice reasonable and workable.

My choice is "judgment." Another might be "common sense." Both of these probably should be prefixed with "spiritual," as in spiritual judgment and spiritual common sense, which pulls from Paul's statement that "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are **spiritually discerned**." ([1 Corinthians 2:14](#)) It is true that worldly common sense or judgment is often in conflict with the spiritually enhanced version. I have seen it many times, and it is the source of many arguments in the Church, especially when dealing with "mundane things."

7. Why is the book of Ecclesiastes so important in understanding the nature of wisdom?

(p. 104-107) It is important to remember that the writer (or source to the writer) was, by God's statement and gift, the wisest man ever; none have or ever will surpass his wisdom, as God himself has stated. ([1 Kings 3:12](#)) Paul reminds the Romans that the Old Testament was written for our instruction and encouragement,

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a sure purpose of godly wisdom ([Romans 15:4](#)), so we would be remiss not learning about wisdom from the wisest man who ever lived.

Packer makes a very important point about the book's major statement, "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "All is vanity." ([Ecclesiastes 12:8](#)) Recently, I have come to believe that this is one of his most important insights and one of the most significant lessons I have ever gotten from this study. Packer argues that the preacher shows the true nature of wisdom by acknowledging that our understanding of the course of events in this world is mostly enigmatic and inexplicable, and it often *appears* as if God has no hand in the events at all. Packer argues that the Preacher (Solomon) strongly warns against trying to figure out God's purpose in every little event and that we must accept the fact that our God is inscrutable and beyond our understanding, that even the man to whom God gave the fullest possible gift of wisdom was such limited comprehension of the purpose of things that he was fortunate to grasp little more than the simplest aspects of God's eternal will and action.

In our modern arrogance, we believe we can know more than we do and, therefore, can judge God for what we believe He did or didn't do. "How could a loving God allow?" or "Why doesn't God just..." or "If I were God..." There are an infinite number of these indictments brought not just by atheists and unbelievers but also by Christians themselves as they fall into the trap of Job's friends rather than learning from Job's abject humility.

In the end, Packer says, we should sing with Richard Baxter:

Ye saints, who toil below
Adore your heavenly King
And onward as ye go
Some joyful anthem sing
Take what He gives
And praise Him still
Through good and ill
Who ever lives.

Sounds like Mr. Baxter has grasped the wisdom of Solomon and Job. (See [Job 1:21](#), [2:10](#), [19:24-26](#))

8. According to Packer, what is the connection between sloth and pride? Why should this out-of-date word (sloth) be important to us right now?

(p. 106-107) Packer says that sloth comes from wounded pride. For Christians, it comes from the failure to know what they were so sure they knew: God's will and purpose for something important to them. They become bewildered and embittered, their spiritual life deadened as the illusion of being a member of the crowd, part of God's secret councils, is shattered. A critical spirit, cynicism, and mounting resentment follow the growing spiritual inertia. They become joyless Christians in name only, the life gone from their walk with God.

Understanding sloth is important now because Packer argues it is a major problem in the Church today. We should remember the admonition of the Preacher, "As you know not what is the way of the wind, nor how the bones grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so, you know not the work of God who does it all." ([Ecclesiastes 11:5](#)) There is a dire need for a large dose of humility to be dumped on the body Christian. May the Spirit of God see fit to bless us so.

9. Ultimately, what form should our quest for wisdom take? What are the things we are questing after?

(p. 108) We should always try to choose the best means to the best end. Our quest is limited since God has no intention of sharing all of his knowledge with us (it is interesting to note how poorly we grasp what He has shared in His Word, to the point that heresy and division are the norm, not the exception). Our quest is a humble understanding of what is expected of us and a resolute commitment to do it. Our godly wisdom should engender peace, humility, and love ([James 3:17](#)). True wisdom binds us to God, like Job, and even when we don't understand what or why, we know that our redeemer lives, and that is enough.

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Eleven: *Thy Word is Truth*. Consider why truth is significant to God's Word. Also, think about Pilate's question to Jesus (*What is truth?*) and ponder what this reveals about us and how we approach this significant aspect of God's revelation of himself.

Truth is a lost word these days. It has become malleable and egocentric. Everyone has their truth, or at least that is the argument when someone says, "You have your truth, and I have my truth," as if that is even possible. If they had said, "You have what you think to be true, and I have what I think to be true," I might be able to deal with that. In addition, facts are not truth. They may point to it, but they are not the thing being pointed to.

Goal: To begin defining our wisdom by God's standard.

Because we were both created in God's image and reborn to renew that image within us, take some time this week to think about how accurately you are reflecting the image of God to the world around you. Then, consider what you can do to make that reflection more faithful.

To paraphrase the dictionary, truth is the quality of being in accord with reality. It is a comprehensive term that implies accuracy and honesty in all its nuances.

So, depending on what you accept as reality, the accuracy and honesty of your position is dependent. One way of nailing it down is to say that truth is real or the basis of actual reality. Jesus said he was "the way, the truth, and the life." Note that he did not say he was *a* truth, but instead *the* truth, that the real reality resided in Him. That makes sense when you consider how Paul described God as the One "in whom we live, move, and have our being." ([Acts 17:27-28](#))

Meditation on Chapter 10: God's Wisdom and Ours

Last week, we focused on God's deep and abiding wisdom in our study of God Only Wise. This week, we look at our apprehension of God's wisdom, one of the greatest gifts he gives his adopted (all but one of God's children are adopted) children. The importance of this gift is a recurring theme at the beginning of the Old Testament book of Proverbs.

Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom; she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore, get wisdom. Though it costs all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor. [Proverbs 4:5-9](#)

However, wisdom is a double-edged sword; being wise alone doesn't mean a successful life (ask Solomon), and people who think they are wise often aren't. Being wise is one of those situations where the knowledge and acceptance of your limitations are integral to getting wisdom and maintaining it. Let's look at Solomon, who, by God's statement, was the wisest man who ever lived or will live.

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men... 1 Kings 4:29-31a

However, when we look at his eventual failures, it becomes obvious that Solomon, despite his wisdom, could not maintain its integrity. Toward the end of his life, he may have completely lost even his great wisdom due to his disobedience.

And the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded. [1 Kings 11:9-10](#)

True wisdom is rooted in learning what God wants to teach us and acting on it, so we must always be on guard not to close our ears to the Lord's admonition and correction. [Proverbs 15:33](#) holds the key.

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The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and *humility comes before honor* [*emphasis added*].

Without proper respect for God our Father and the willingness to bow our knees daily in ready submission, wisdom will either elude or leave us.

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil. ([Ephesians 5:14-16](#))

So, your mental and spiritual attitude is just as important as anything else (maybe more so) in acquiring and maintaining wisdom.

However, we can aspire to wisdom, according to Packer, because we are made in God's image; further, as Christians, we are "being renewed in the image of Christ and God." Because we are made in God's image, we possess that portion of his communicable attributes (of which wisdom is one), which, as created beings, God could give us and still maintain the integrity between the creator and the created. Therefore, as his unique creation, we have the God-given capacity for wisdom.

Despite that, Packer believes some preconditions or prerequisites must be met. These include reverence and willingness to receive, which require acknowledging God as the source of wisdom while being willing to receive his wisdom by interacting with and embracing His Word, the Scriptures. Only with a submitted heart will we do these two things. In the New Testament, that submitted heart comes only from those who have been born again.

When we look at the Word of God as the door into wisdom, we should appreciate that his Word views things as they are; it is realistic above all else. The scriptures see the depravity and spiritual hunger of mankind, the willing personal sacrifice alongside the deception and treachery that mark out the human race, even the chosen of God (i.e., King David). In addition, the scriptures clearly show the nature of wisdom and how abandoning it leads to vanity and then destruction, as is so eloquently illustrated in Ecclesiastes, which could be seen as the "Confessions of Solomon."

Packer closes this chapter by exposing the problems of sloth and pride and their intimate connection to each other. Pride prevents us from seeing our lives as they are; instead, it colors everything so things appear as we want them to be. Pride creates the pretense or illusion of wisdom.

Sloth, on the other hand, despite being an outdated word, turns out to be very descriptive of the problems we face in our pursuit of wisdom. Packer argues that much of the sloth or apparent laziness we see in Christians comes from wounded pride and is a direct result of rejecting the reforming lessons of humility. Discouraged, we internalize an aversion to the work required to admit to our error, repent, and amend our ways. We avoid the necessary work because it is extremely painful, in all circumstances humbling, and means the admission of abject failure, which is the antithesis of pride.

Packer argues that the simplest definition of wisdom is that it always pursues "*the best means to the best end*", which he notes is God's "chosen end of restoring and perfecting the relationship between himself and human beings—the relationship for which he made them."

In the end, what is wisdom, according to Packer? It is this:

... a disposition to confess that he [God] is wise, and to cleave to him and live for him in the light of his Word through thick and thin.

I like that, "through thick and thin." And it will:

... make us more humble, more joyful, more godly, more quick-sighted as to his will, more resolute in the doing of it and less troubled (not less sensitive, but less bewildered) than we were at the dark and painful things of which our life in this fallen world is full. The New Testament tells us that the fruit of wisdom is Christlikeness..."

It seems God's wisdom offers us what we need in life. Contrary to the problems Solomon faced with his gift of wisdom, Christians have the advantage of the new birth and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to guide and convict their use of that wisdom. While it does not mean we won't fail like Solomon, we have a significant advantage in the struggle.

Meditation on Chapter 10: God's Wisdom and Ours

I close this lesson with the fervent desire that you continue to grow in Christlikeness and put aside, as the author of Hebrews says, anything that hinders your pursuit, especially the sin that so readily and easily entangles all of us. May God's grace and peace be with you today, and may your pursuit of wisdom be diligent and never-ending.

Chapter 11: Thy Word is Truth

Today's theme: It is God who defines the nature of truth, and He does that for us in His Word.

This is the issue: truth. When Jesus told Pilate, "Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice," Pilate, reflecting on the world's approach to the answer, replied, "What is truth?" That pretty much hits the nail on the head and drives it home. When the truth is staring you in the face, do you, like Pilate, step to the side and avoid facing the demand?

Before we can discuss Pilate's failure concerning the truth and address the issues Packer raises in this chapter, several points need to be made:

- All belief systems that make truth claims, such as Christianity, have an a priori starting point (the accepted foundation on which everything else is built). Christianity begins with two facts about God and they are assumptions or a priories used by Packer for this chapter:
 1. **God is King** – He rules over us with absolute authority.
 2. **God speaks**—God has spoken to his people and, as King, expects them to respond to what He has said.
- That God speaks postulates the Word (Scripture) as the source of knowing what God has said. While other truth claims are often made (God told me...or I heard God say...), only the Scripture, God's Word written, is the universal source for Christian truth claims. If it is not in the Word and supported by it, we cannot state it as truth from God.

Scriptural background: Deuteronomy 32:4 "He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He."

Rock (the unmoving), perfection (no error or omission), all-encompassing justice (never capricious), righteous (without sin or stain or spot), upright (moral and ethical and there for all to see), and in the center of it all, truth.

Quotes for the week

"Truth is truth, to the end of reckoning." William Shakespeare (1564–1616). *Measure for Measure*. Act v. Sc. 1.

To the end of reckoning—in other words, while thinking clearly still exists anywhere—the truth will not change. It is not whimsical or malleable. It is, like the steadfast love of God, from everlasting to everlasting.

"You will find that the truth is often unpopular, and the contest between agreeable fancy and disagreeable fact is unequal." Adlai E. Stevenson. Commencement address at Michigan State, *NY Times* 9 June 1958.

Agreeable fancy—a nice way to tell a lie that soothes conflict—and the hard reality of truth are often in opposition. The sad part is that agreeable fancy usually wins out. It is a much easier, less demanding road.

"We seek the truth and will endure the consequences." Charles Seymour, President, Yale. Recalled on his death 11 August 1963.

It is pretty much a given that if you seek the truth, you will have consequences, which will eventually be so severe that your character will be weighed in the balance.

Concern: Are we wise enough to seek our truth in God and to let every man be a liar?

How many times, when the Word of God conflicts (not due to one of many possible interpretations but in direct plain-spoken surety) do you side with man's opinion using the big "**But**"? How is this possible for a professed believer?

"For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth." [*Psalm 33:4*](#)

Is all our work done in truth? While we may not like what God demands (it would be instructive to examine our real, down-to-the-root motives here), that doesn't let us off the hook; it puts us squarely on the side of rebellion when we say, "No, I will not."

1. Why is the truthfulness of God so important to everything we are?

Think about the underlying issue of trust. If God is not truthful, where can we trust him? How do we know what is reliable and what isn't? If God cannot be trusted, we have no hope. We are left adrift; life is a joke, and we are the punch line in a cosmic comedy.

"The Elder, to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth **which abides in us** and **will be with us forever.**" 2 John 1-2 (**emphasis added for focus.**)

Try substituting Christ in place of truth in the above passage. Notice that it does not change the essential meaning. It is not without import that Jesus said he was "the way, the truth, and the life." [John 14:6](#)

There are several intertwined issues in this scripture that relate to the truthfulness of God. John is writing to the **elect** lady. Election, by definition, is God's eternal choice, not ours. Setting aside the question of how John can call the recipient of his letter elect, look instead at the underlying truth that God chooses ([Romans 8:29-30, 33](#)). Scripture tells us that God elects his children.

The truthfulness of God's election decision, its reliability through time and eternity, is determinative and is either forever, as John asserts, or God is unreliable and not truthful. We who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior have put everything we are into the trustworthiness of God's truthfulness, as well as into the trustworthiness of both Him and His Word.

2. What is the truth that abides in us forever? Why will it be with us forever? (Consider [John 14:6](#))

When Jesus said that **HE** was the way, the truth, and the life, and as Christians, we are **IN** Christ and Christ is **IN** us. That means truth (Jesus Christ) abides in us and us in truth forever. He is the beginning point of our faith ([Hebrews 12:2](#)).

Jesus promised never to leave us or forsake us ([Hebrews 13:5](#)), that he will always be there to save us ([Hebrews 7:25](#)), and we are sealed (evidence of the guarantee) by the Holy Spirit ([Ephesians 1:12-14](#)), who leads us into all truth ([John 16:13](#)).

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To come to terms with the absolute truth of God's Word (theologically speaking – its inerrancy).

Inerrancy – Freedom from error or untruths; infallibility: belief in the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

We are adrift if we cannot trust the truth of the Scriptures, God's Word. We cannot know what to believe or question, and we are left with man's wisdom (shifting sand) to help us decide what is true. God and His Word are trustworthy and without error, or He and it are not.

We should remember what Jeremiah said ([6:16a](#) ESV). Thus says the LORD, "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient path, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." God's Word is the ancient path, the good way that will give us rest for our souls.

In [1Corinthians 15:12-19](#), Paul argues that the whole of our salvation rests on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is correct, but for him and his readers, contemporaries to the actual events and the living witnesses carry this belief forward with so much weight. For us, however, finding our way by the light of God's Word, the trustworthiness and truthfulness of that Word is paramount. It is our only hope since we must believe that Paul's argument, as the Scriptures present it, is true before we can accept the truth it proposes. We begin and end with the truth of God's Word as presented.

1. What two-fold character aspects does Packer say the Bible pictures the Word of God as having? Explain the meaning of these two character traits in relation to our beliefs.

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(p. 109-110) Packer says that "God speaks both to determine our environment (God is King and relates to the things around us—he governs us and establishes government) and to engage our minds and hearts (we are creatures and subjects, and he relates to us directly—he fellowships with us)." He establishes laws, which he expects us to follow, and testifies, giving us insight into himself and us. In this way, God's Word is governmental and moral/theological (engaging our minds and actions). But God does not remain a distant ruler; he seeks fellowship with us and, in doing so, engages our hearts. By God's initiation, we have a loving, familial relationship with him. He is more than King; He is our Father; Jesus, the Son, is our brother, and the Holy Spirit is our guide and counselor. He is our LORD, governs us, and is our Father, brother, and counselor; He seeks fellowship with us.

2. What is significant about the Bible's first three chapters (Genesis 1-3) in illustrating this twofold aspect of the character of the Word of God?

(p. 110-112) The beginning of Genesis assures us that everything in our environment was put there by God. "In the beginning..." The whole creation account shows God's complete mastery over his creative efforts. He speaks everything into being and orders it all in perfect harmony. He is King and LORD over all he has created.

But after creating Adam and then Eve from him, he speaks to them, walks with them, and instructs them—God is action; he is not passive and hands-off. He determines the environment we live in and engages our minds and hearts.

3. Packer titles his first subsection, The God Who Speaks. What does this say about God, and why is it important?

(p.110-113) It says several things about God:

- He is **creative** through his spoken Word, "...and God said, 'Let...'" Eight times, Packer notes, God did this, and everything sprang into being and into order.
- He **communicates** with us and tells us what He wants from us. He does not leave us to guess what He expects. God spoke with Adam, giving him commands, testimony, prohibition, and promise.
- Packer says that the Word of God is **determinative**, and he gives power to his prophets, such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, etc., to proclaim his truth, to uproot or to plant, to tear down and destroy, or to build nations and kingdoms by the proclamation of his Word.
- He judges us by **how we respond** to his Word: refusing and therefore wicked ([Jeremiah 13:10](#)) or fearfully humble and godly ([Isaiah 66:2](#)).

4. What important fact do we learn about God's Word in the lives of Jeremiah and Isaiah? Find New Testament examples that illustrate this same thing. How does this knowledge affect your life?

(p. 112-114) Packer tells us, "The fact that the word of God really determines world events was the first lesson that God taught Jeremiah when he called him to be a prophet." With Isaiah, God proclaims the same truth in a slightly different context as Packer illustrates with [Isaiah 55:10-11](#): "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish . . . so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire." God is in control, and His Word is the vehicle through which we understand what He is accomplishing.

Paul makes it clear that God is in control and has given Christ the power to subject everything to his will ([1 Corinthians 15:22-26](#)). "As in Adam, all die, so also in Christ, all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who belong to Christ at his coming. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after **destroying every rule and every authority and power**. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet."

Add to that [Romans 8:31-39](#), and you have the Christian's knowledge that he has nothing to fear, for God is in control of all that matters. God in Christ has conquered everything, including death itself. This puts

everything in life into its proper perspective.

5. What other claim does Packer argue that the word of God has on us besides that it comes from our Creator? How does this other claim affect you personally?

(p. 113) It has the claim of absolute truth—Its author is “the God of truth.” ([Psalm 31:5](#); [Isaiah 65:16](#))

Packer argues that biblical truth is primarily a quality of persons (including the person of God) and only secondarily of propositions (statements of truth affirmation). Biblical truth is not a philosophical abstract but a real quality, lived out in God’s interaction with His creation.

That is significant because it removes the argument that “your truth” and “my truth” exists—there is only God’s truth. We apprehend this fact biblically in statements such as [John 17:17-19](#) where Jesus says, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake, I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

6. God’s utterances to man generally fall into three categories. What are these categories, where are they found in the Bible, and how do they relate to your life?

(p. 110, 113-116) Going back to page 110, we see the threefold breakout of God’s utterances: law, promise, and testimony. On pages 113-116, Packer shows the truth of the law and promises.

- Law—God’s commands are true ([Psalm 119:151](#)). Jesus tied their obedience to love: If you love me, you will keep my commandments ([John 14:15](#)). Packer makes an interesting argument that our souls require “worship, law-keeping, truthfulness, honesty, discipline, self-control, and service to God and our fellows.” If we abandon this in our lives, we destroy our souls. Calling upon Richard Baxter, Packer notes we eventually become “A Saint—or a Brut.” I am reminded of Lincoln’s famous statement about why he refused a suggested candidate for his cabinet: “I don’t like his face,” the President replied. “But the poor man isn’t responsible for his face,” responded his advocate. “Every man over forty is responsible for his face,” countered Lincoln.

We never stand still or reach the point where we have arrived ([Philippians 3:12-14](#)); we are either becoming more like Christ or less like him. It is our choice.

- Promise—God keeps his promises—“He who promised is faithful” ([Hebrews 10:23](#)) and that faithfulness is across all generations ([Psalm 119:90](#)). When God says it, he does it! God’s promises are our hope and inheritance.
- Testimony—God tells us about himself and the people who follow or reject him. These things, Paul tells the Corinthians, are for our instruction ([1 Corinthians 10:11](#)). This is where God opens his heart to us, instructs us as a father, disciplining us in love ([Hebrews 12:5-11](#)).

7. How does Packer define a Christian? Is his definition biblical? Why or why not? How does this definition relate to you and your concept of what it means to be a Christian?

(P. 116) Packer says a Christian is one who acknowledges and lives under the Word of God. I believe this is absolutely biblical. I go back to the demand of the great commandment ([Luke 10:27](#)) and Jesus’ tying love to obedience ([John 14:15](#)).

This argument puts the Word at the center of the Christian life and means that the Word judges everything about me: my thoughts, my actions, my theology, my everything—it defines the faith once delivered ([Jude 3](#)) and my apprehension of it.

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Twelve: *The Love of God*. Consider the significance of St. John’s great statement in [1 John 4:8](#), whose main point is repeated in verse 16. Think about how easy it is to misuse that statement to justify that which God condemns by twisting its context. This week, examine yourself in relation to this concern.

Paul makes a serious statement to the Philippians that we would all do well to take to heart: “And this I pray,

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that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” ([Philippians 1:9-11](#)) This is the great antidote to love as license, stating love requires discernment that acts without offense and is righteous. LOVE never excuses sin—forgives it, yes—excuses it, NEVER!

Goal: Always view God’s word in context and allow it to be the touchstone of our existence.

Pledge that from this day forward, you will always be a spiritual Berean (see [Acts 17:11](#)), a believer who rightly and humbly uses the Word of God as the arbiter of all that is true and right. Now, follow through on it.

I had an important experience shortly after I became a Christian. I was coming out of the counterculture and still recovering from a bad LSD trip. One night, I was in my Ford Econoline van, and things got pretty shaky. On the center console was my new Bible. I pulled over to the side of the road, picked up my Bible, and said to God and everything/everyone else, “I stake my eternal destiny on what is in this book. I claim what it says as truth, which will be true for my life, and I reject everything this book rejects.” That night, I tied everything I was and would be to the Word of God, the Bible. From that moment on, it was, is, and always would be the arbiter of truth for me.

Meditation on Chapter 11: Thy Word is Truth

The title of this chapter, *Thy Word Is Truth*, comes from the King James Version of the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17:17: “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*” This is the foundation of everything that enables us to live out our lives as Christians. When the Apostle Thomas touched the wounds of Jesus in the upper room and sealed his faith, Jesus told him:

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” John 20:29

Jesus was talking about everyone who did not see him post-resurrection, which includes all of us and 99.9999% of all those who have accepted Christ throughout history. We have all depended on past witnesses and the primary witness of the Word.

Before I get onto the veracity of the Word, which is the central theme of this chapter, let me observe the statement “and yet have believed.” The grammatical construction is past perfect tense. Even though I was not yet born when Jesus said this, the way I interpret that statement is that Jesus, the author, and finisher of my salvation, is saying that my saving faith was already a fact, not a supposition, and was signed, sealed, and delivered even at this moment when he was conversing with Thomas. I know this is hard for people with difficulty with the Reformed perspective, but this is a big part of the rock I stand on.

After spending the two previous chapters establishing the significance of God’s wisdom over ours and identifying how important it is to rely on God’s guidance in formulating and living out our lives, Packer now addresses how we access that wisdom. According to Dr. Packer, the access mechanism is two-fold. Yes, it is the Word, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, but it is also plain ordinary language (commerce Greek) and not a special priestly language designed for God talk. It was the everyday language of the day, written by common men trying to convey what God had given them to say in an everyday vernacular.

However, when Dr. Packer wrote this short chapter in 1973, post-modernism and deconstructionism had not ascended to their current prominence in the day-to-day understanding of things. While situational ethics and relativism had taken root in Packer’s day, the essential nihilism of our post-modern deconstructed mindset was still twenty-five years away from beginning to impact the person on the street through the now ubiquitous media, entertainment, literature, and music.

Today we have to deal with the problem that rather than argue with us over the meaning of biblical passages or engage us in reasonable debate over what God intended us to understand through Paul or Peter or John or Luke, we have to deal with outright dismissal of the text and the argued fundamental irrelevance of anything and everything in our sacred writings. Language, it is argued, is only an approximate abstraction that carries no

concrete reality, so whatever was written 2000-3000 years ago carries no substantive or even determinable meaning for anyone today. Instead, the ineffable creative force of the universe speaks to each heart uniquely, but only in the broadest of contexts. With that backdrop, we are told that we cannot depend on the shifting sands of another's poor attempts to codify the uncodifiable (read the Bible here). Rather than attack the Scriptures themselves, the approach used during the Enlightenment and subsequent scholarly attempts to shred any objectionable element in the sacred writings, which probably reached its zenith in the Jesus Seminar and its personally defined categories based on internal prejudices, what is now attacked is the ability of language itself to convey any sustentative meaning and thereby the Scriptures, being rooted and grounded in language, are essentially meaningless (according to this argument) as vehicles of truth. While I claim no deep and extended knowledge in these areas of our Christian God and Scripture bashing (just voracious reading, half of which I can never remember...), I believe my take on this is accurate.

While dealing with this pervasive nihilism, I concluded that although the "scholarly science" of these current attacks is relatively new, their essence is first-century and rooted in the ecstatic mystery religions of the Roman Empire that competed with emergent Christianity and demanded a personal and transcendent experience of the indescribable and inexpressible (what we know now as Gnosticism). God was melded with us at what we would call a precognitive level in deep, ecstatic spiritual moments. This approach was contrasted with Christianity, which, while having a deeply experiential component, was fundamentally rooted in historical fact and objective reality, passed on by witness and the written Word. If you need help here, think of the Bereans (Acts 17:11) who determined the truth of Paul's teaching by comparing his words with God's Words. God was assumed to be true, as defined in his revealed Word; the teaching of a man as suspect until it passed the necessary tests. The reality of truth and the understanding and apprehension of God was rooted in the Word, which by its very nature depended on language and its reliable meanings and constructs.

This whole non-Christian milieu in which we now swim contrasts with Packer's first section heading: *The God Who Speaks*. Compare that with the post-modern deconstructed (PMD) god who mumbles in non-verbal emoting felt by a postulated celestial detection grid uniquely created by our individual higher consciousness networked into a cosmic global mind. What kind of god is that? The God of the Bereans and Packer is personal, has direct conversations with his human creations, actually lived among them through his Son Jesus Christ, and expects us to ***read, mark, and inwardly digest*** what he has said, expecting not a single jot or tittle to pass away until everything is accomplished. The PMD god can't "speak" because "it" is non-personal. While *it* may possess a form of consciousness on a grand universal scale, it is a desireless ground of being, which, in my opinion, needs to be turned over by a good cosmic roto-tiller and shot through with an ample dose of weed killer.

As William Shakespeare so aptly said, "Truth is truth, to the end of reckoning." Measure for Measure. Act v. Sc. 1. So, in the end, our first fight is to make the actual words of the scriptures meaningful and worthy of consideration, not to those outside the faith. However, evangelism can be important, but as far as our understanding, it has been ruefully tainted by the PMD influences around us. Our sanctification depends on the Word and its eternally significant language. Our ability to read, mark, and inwardly digest requires it. How can we study to show ourselves approved if we don't accept the fundamental source material God has given us as absolutely meaningful?

In the closing portion of this chapter, Packer defines a Christian as one who acknowledges and lives under the Word of God. The Word rules them, not they it. In [Daniel 10:21](#), the angel sent to protect Daniel in the lion's den tells him, "*But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth.*" We must choose as Christians seeking to work out our sanctification (why else are you doing this study?) in fear and trembling (honor and respect), what do we finally depend on? How do we judge what we see, hear, and experience? That is the question on which our eternal destiny turns.

To quote my personal story about my dependence on sola scriptura:

You have to understand that I had wallowed in the subjective experience of the occult for years. I sought out the dark side, and the devil found me during one hellaciously bad acid trip, where the floor of my townhouse opened up, exposing the fires of hell. The devil looked at me and said, "It's time to go!" Through direct and dramatic experience, I know how easy it was for your own subjective experiences and the witness of others to see their experiences lead you astray. For me to go forward with my newly accepted Christianity, I had to

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make a choice similar to the choice I had made to follow Christ. I knew there had to be a trail, a path, a roadmap for me to use on my perilous journey. I also knew that my chosen map would determine where I ended up. So, with an oppressive darkness pressing in all around me, I decided that the Bible, the eternal Word of God, was my only possible guide. At that moment, in my van, I sealed the course of my remaining life. It was sola scriptura from that point forward.

So, good Christians, choose this day for what you will follow and what will be the basis of your understanding. It is the Word of God, the Scriptures for me and my life. What is it for you?

Meditation on Chapter 11: Thy Word is Truth

Chapter 12: The Love of God

Today's theme: God's greatest mystery, His enduring love of mankind.

When one begins to understand that agape (ἀγάπη), the Greek word for love that God uses to describe himself, is defined by sacrificial action (not emotive feelings), God's faithful love of his unique creation comes into better focus. That said, I still have asked the same question expressed in the song "For Those Tears I Died" —*But, Jesus, why me?* Yes, it is the greatest mystery I will ever confront, but it is hidden in the heart of God.

Scriptural background: [1 John 4:7-9](#) "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this, the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him."

Every instance of love in that passage is a form of the word agape. We often forget that there is an immeasurable difference between "God is love," as John stated, and "Love is God". The first is from the Scriptures and defines love. The second is from the heart of man and tries to define God, which John never did, though many misinformed Christians have made and continue to make that mistake.

Quotes for the week

"One unquestioned text we read, all doubt beyond, all fear above; nor crackling pile nor cursing creed can burn or blot it—God is love." Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–1894).

God, as the embodiment of love, breaks through all efforts to destroy love's life-saving message.

"I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world." Mother Teresa MC. News summaries, 1 September 1982.

This reflects an oft-used sermon illustration about Christians being God's hands, feet, and mouth. He mysteriously uses our demonstrably weak vessels to accomplish his often difficult purposes in the world.

"Thou canst not pray to God without praying to Love, but mayest pray to Love without praying to God." Richard Garnett (1835–1906). *De Flagello myrteo*. xiii.

In elevating God, you elevate all noble virtues, but in elevating any virtue, you risk losing what you seek to embody. For a sobering thought on this issue, look at [Philippians 1:9-11](#). Love without knowledge and discernment is license (see the Concern section below), not what it purports to be.

"I have learned that human existence is essentially tragic. It is only the love of God, disclosed and enacted in Christ, that redeems the human tragedy and makes it tolerable. No, more than tolerable. Wonderful." Angus Dun, former Episcopal Bishop of Washington DC. Recalled on his death, 12 August 1971.

Without the love of God, life and human existence are meaningless and an unregarded blink of a moment in the deep well of eternity. With God's love, wonder flies across the face of creation, declaring that we piddling human beings matter so much in the eternal scheme of things that the eternal, almighty God tasted death to demonstrate the depth of his love for us—FOR US!

Concern: Will we seek God's "Luv," avoiding the real love, the "tough love" of God?

In our American culture, "love" has been so watered down that it often could be parodied as "Luv," a true caricature of itself. That is the problem with biblical study for many people. It calls into question so much of (wait for it) the water in which we swim that when we begin to realize how fouled our everyday environment is, we wonder if there is any way we can get it even a little bit cleaned up. Sometimes, I wish I could give my brain a good scrubbing.

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more *in knowledge and all discernment*, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with *the fruits of righteousness* which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." [Philippians 1:9-11](#)

2. Why is this passage important to understanding how God's love should grow and mature within us?

Two words: *knowledge* and *discernment*. As I said earlier, love without knowledge and discernment devolves into license. So many wrong decisions and sinful actions are justified by what I prefer to call "luv" (see **Goal** below). This is not the biblical agape (ἀγάπη—God's sacrificial love and primary NT usage for what is translated love) or philios (φιλία—sibling/neighborly [brotherly] love, the historical basis of the Society of Friends [Quakers] and the city of Philadelphia). It may be a distorted view of storge (στοργή—the natural familial, parent/child bond), but only in an erroneous "I will give them whatever-they-want" or as my mother incorrectly used to tell me "whatever-makes-you-happy" sense. In this passage, Paul argues for our love to be sincere, righteous, and without offense (to God, not man—some people will always be offended by God's definition of love). To accomplish that, we need to use all of our biblical knowledge and spiritual discernment to act in a holy and righteous manner. Accepting that changes everything about how we live and enforces biblical bounds on our decisions and actions, even when we cannot control our feelings, which are never an excuse for action.

3. "A Song of God's Majesty and Love: I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever." [Psalm 145:1](#)

What is the significance of the psalmist linking majesty and love together? How does that inform our understanding of the nature of God's love and how His love transforms whatever it touches?

The combination of Majesty (the pinnacle of wonderment) and Love (the epitome of sacrifice and willingness to do the dirty work agape requires) is revealing in its breadth and astonishing in how far God goes to demonstrate his unbelievable willingness to do what is necessary for our eternal destiny in Him. We are, after all, wretched, recalcitrant sinners who try to thwart him at every turn, even when we think we are being pious and Christian. When that astonishing Majesty reaches down, down, down into the mundaneness of our muddled existence and touches us with its empowering agape, it brings with it more than we could ever hope for, an unbelievable wonderment, exemplified in the cross, where its eternal willingness and sacrificial focus was tested true.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To love with God's love, expressed to God and our neighbor—the Great Commandment (see [Luke 10:27](#)).

We live in a time when love has been reduced to mere sentiment (luv) at best or, more often, lust when expressed at its worst. "Love" is used to justify all sorts of evil, at least evil as defined by God in His Word (we are often, unsurprisingly, at odds with God over these issues). Love is bandied about as the universal panacea, the balm for every ill, as if love, by itself, is "the redemption that draweth nigh." We need to firmly ground ourselves in what love is from God's perspective and how God's love should change our hearts and inform our understanding and expression of love in this world in which we live.

Remember the last chapter's significance on the truth of God's Word? We should begin using God's definitions to understand this fundamental element of existence. We should never forget that God's biblically-based definition begins with decision/action while ours begins with feeling/emotion. We must always remember that the one who controls the definitions controls the argument. Satan understands this very well, and the attack on the real meaning of anything related to language in our modern times, where everything, in the end, means what YOU want it to, leaves the podium/pulpit sinking in quicksand with all our biblical arguments cast down by the arbiter, who while an oxymoron—how can his meaning be meaningful when all others are not—authoritatively asserts that what we believe to be true is meaningless. It is time to reclaim the rock on which we must stand and, if only in our lives, declare God's Word true, trustworthy, and meaningful.

Chapter 12: The Love of God

1. Why is this famous utterance of St. John one of the New Testament's most misunderstood and misused scriptures? How has your opinion of the passage changed due to this chapter?

(p. 117-118) Outside of Packer's arguments, I want to say, first and foremost, that most people get this passage and concept backward in an anthropomorphic sense—they assume that love defines God and then base that definition on what they believe/think/feel about love. Nothing could be further from the biblical perspective. Instead, God defines love by who he is and what he does. We will talk more about this later.

While each person's reaction to this chapter and their understanding of love will be unique, several generalities seem to be valid:

- They have never thought about this in any depth.
- They do not realize the theological significance of any anthropomorphic backwardness they might have about the subject.
- When they finally understand the real issues and the truth of the matter, they begin to question almost everything about their lives. I can almost see them closing their eyes and putting their hands over their ears as they chant, "Na, na, na, na, na..." to avoid it all.

Remember Packer's point that experiencing the love of God is a "normal part of ordinary Christian experience."

2. What three points does Packer make about Paul's statement in Romans 5:5? Why are those three observations important to you today?

1. (p. 118-119) The three points and their significance are:

2. **Shed abroad** means poured or dumped out. God has flooded our innermost hearts with his love. This love is both deep and overwhelming and forms the foundation of our existence. God initiates; he is not dependent on us or our responses. He is sovereign in his choices and actions.

Importance: If we are parched, it is not because God doesn't want us to be flooded with his love (special circumstances notwithstanding, such as dark nights of the soul). Ultimately, it is not dependent on us but on the loving reliability of our heavenly Father.

3. This **poured out** is in the perfect tense, which means it is a settled state or completed action, not something we are waiting for or something that has passed us by. It is in the ever-present now by the grace of God, who sustains his Fatherly love, which is always available to us.

Importance: We have it; we can't lose it; we can only suppress it or grieve it by our sin, so we should see how important repentance is in our spiritual lives. The thing to remember is that God is always reliable; he keeps his word.

4. This **flooding** is the regular ministry of the Holy Spirit to the children of God. Packer notes that we fail to appreciate enough the "Spirit's ordinary work of giving peace, joy, hope, and love, through the shedding abroad in our hearts of the knowledge of the love of God."

Importance: If the Spirit empowers, it is spiritually received. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit ([Ephesians 4:30](#)). Remember that this flooding is God's loving action in our lives, not some emotional high. Though that may sometimes be part of it, it is never the root, only some of the delicious fruit.

3. Packer makes four observations about the nature of God we have thus far examined. What are they, and what do you think of his veiled warning?

(p. 119) **Wisdom** lets us look into God's mind; **power** shows us his hand and arm (action); **word** shows us his mouth (voice—he speaks/has spoken); and finally, **love** demonstrates his heart.

Packer warns that investigating the nature of God is holy ground (think of Moses before the burning bush) and "we need the grace of reverence, that we may tread it without sin." This is sage advice for those who

live in a world lacking in an appreciation of reverence. Far too many claiming to be Christians treat God as their buddy or their Santa Claus, and in my view, to their peril.

4. Why does St. John's statement in 1 John 4:8 not give us the complete truth about God's love as expressed within the bible? What is missing?

(p. 120-122) Other biblical statements similar to John's "God is love" touch on other aspects of God's nature, such as "God is spirit" and "God is light." These help put John's statement in context and balance the extremes some people seem to fall into when trying to understand what John meant.

While the statement is often treated as the definitive statement on the nature of God, Packer argues that is incorrect, reminding us that the statement is a summation of all of the biblical witness about God to that point. It does not stand alone but as a capstone on a large structure. It doesn't negate all that came before but instead puts it into perspective. To gain that perspective, we have to remember that the love being defined here is agape, which is best defined as self-sacrifice in action, where the actor (God) imparts eternal worth and value to the object of his love (us) where that worth and value was absent. God does not agape us because we are worth his love. We are worth his love because he agapes us by His sovereign choice.

Packer uses two other statements to balance John: God is spirit and light.

- **Spirit**—In [John 4:24](#), Jesus says, "God is spirit." Packer correctly points out that adding the article and making it "God is a spirit" is incorrect and destroys Jesus' intent, which is meant to contrast God's fundamental nature (spirit) with ours (flesh). Flesh limits us. Spirit does not limit God. In discussion with the woman at the well, Jesus tells us that we must meet God in our worship in spirit (part of our born-again nature as Christians) to transcend the limits of our flesh. In spirit, it does not matter where we are because, as Hebrews 4:16 notes, we can draw near the throne of grace while being grounded by our flesh in a place and time.
- **Light**—In [1 John 1:5](#), John declares that he heard from Jesus and now declares to us that "God is light." John uses this to admonish those who had lost touch with their moral compass and who, in contrast to God, had darkness in them. On the other hand, God is pure light, "and in him there is no darkness at all." Biblically, light means purity, holiness, and righteousness, while darkness means sinfulness, moral depravity, and unrighteousness. We are called to "walk in the light" [1 John 1:7](#) and as Jesus said in [John 12:46](#), to move from the darkness into the light he provides.

Rather than love, spirit, or light defining God, they are instead aspects of his nature about which he alone defines the perfect expression. As a result, we are called to love like God and walk in the light and spirit like God, who defines what that means for us.

5. Why, according to Packer, would St. John's words be considered an adequate revelation of God's love for the Christian? (Note: not the world in general but specifically the Christian.)

(p. 123-124) Packer says that as a Christian, "God is love" expresses the complete truth for us because it "means that his love finds expression in everything that he says and does." This is where the rubber meets the road of our spiritual journey of discipleship. Packer notes, "Everything that happens to us expresses God's love to us, and comes to us to further God's purpose for us...at every moment and in every event of every day's life. Even when we cannot see the why and the wherefore of God's dealings, we know that there is [Godly] love in and behind them, so we can always rejoice, even when humanly speaking, things are going wrong."

There you have the crux of the matter, the nexus point on which it all turns. Creation and we within it are who and what we are because of God's willingness to act self-sacrificially on our behalf. Think about that for a moment.

6. Examine Packer's definitions of God's love and its six parts. Explain how each part of the definition relates to you personally.

(p. 120-126) Packer defines God's love as "an exercise of his goodness toward individual sinners whereby, having identified himself with their welfare, he has given his Son to be their Savior [a task the Son willingly

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embraced before the foundation of the world], and now brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relation." He explains this expression of God's goodness has six parts.

1. **Love**—it is an exercise of his goodness, and while it may get old, it is true that God's love defines goodness by his kindness and cosmic generosity.
2. **Expressed toward Sinners corporately**—God's grace and mercy to all mankind (think [John 3:16](#)) expresses his loving goodness. He does this by choosing and acting (the essence of agape) for "his own sovereign good pleasure."
3. **Expressed toward Sinners Individually**—my election/God's choice of me is an exercise of his loving goodness and generosity, and "not a vague, diffused good" because we were chosen in him (individually) from before the foundation of the world ([Ephesians 1:4-12](#))
4. **Identifies with Sinners' Welfare**—the generousness of God's loving goodness is borne out by his binding up his love and purpose with ours, for which he became our human brother and knows our struggles intimately.
5. **Gives the gift of Salvation through His Son**—the cross is "the crowning proof of the reality and boundlessness of God's love," and as Paul so ably writes in [Roman 5:8](#) "But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" demonstrating his goodness toward we who rebelled against him, did not love him, yet he loved us.
6. **Bring us into a covenant relationship**—God permanently pledges himself to us in a covenant relationship that he never breaks, no matter how many times we fail. He promised to Abraham "to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." ([Genesis 17:1-7](#)) As Richard Sibbes said, "This is the first and fundamental [covenantal] promise. Indeed, it is the life and soul of all promises."
7. How do the questions Packer asks in the last section affect your view of God's love? Think of applying the reality check of chapter 10 (God's wisdom vs. our wisdom) to these questions. What effect does it have?

If all this is true, I must examine myself and my response to such great goodness, such a great gift. It sharply clarifies the Great Commandment and how I live it out.

Applying God's wisdom to this examination strips me bare and exposes all my failures in light of his love. He did so much, and I do so little, and without his help (Philippians 4:13), I can do nothing, but with his help, I can accomplish what I must do.

When you strip everything down to its foundation, the great truth behind the Reformation is this: without the sufficiency of Christ and the grace of God supporting, undergirding, and enriching everything we do and are, nothing we attempt or anything we become has any eternal value. Coming to grips with that is fundamental to our Christianity and very humbling.

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Thirteen: *The Grace of God*. Throughout the history of the Christian Church, men have tried to use their actions instead of God's grace to find justification and eternal worth in themselves. Can grace be grace if you earn it? Think about that this week.

Christianity is unique because its fundamental requirements are unattainable by anything we can do. Our salvation is utterly by grace alone. We cannot earn it; we cannot balance the evil, the sin, and the failures with good, no matter how hard we try. To put it in a Hindu perspective, only Christ can pay our karmic debt; we cannot since all of our efforts are tainted by sin. A famous song epitomizes this human failure to believe we can save ourselves. It was the signature song of Frank Sinatra: "I Did It My Way."

Goal: Every day this week, do one act of Godly love.

Great changes often result from accumulating many small changes until a tipping point is reached. Begin tipping

your life toward God's loving kindness by doing at least one small act of Godly love each day this week.

One of the great lessons of life is learning that if perseverance continues, continuous small efforts can eventually lead to big changes. Do not fall into the trap of waiting for a big opportunity to make a change; pick up that piece of paper, then the next and the next, and eventually, by one small effort after another, it amounts to something big (a whole road is cleaned up).

Meditation on Chapter 12: The Love of God

It has taken us eleven chapters and two Prefaces to reach this point. Still, today, we address what some believers argue is the central theme of humanity's relationship with God, not just Christianity's core theological truth: the love of God. While examining this essential attribute of God's nature and a fundamental aspect of his relationship with us, his creation, we must ask ourselves a very important question: in the expression "the love of God," what does love mean? When John says in [3:16](#), the most famous of all biblical passages:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

We rightfully have to ask ourselves to define the meaning of love as it is used in this pivotal assertion. This is not an attempt at obfuscation like the famous Clinton line, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is." No, it is because in English, the word "love" covers such a broad range of connotations that its meaning can easily be distorted to support things that are not related to biblical love. Why else would Paul have to offer the Philippians a clarifying statement on the expression of love in his prayer for them ([Philippians 1:9-11](#))?

In addition, our problem is not helped by the popular misconceptions surrounding John's statement ([1 John 4:8, 16](#)), "God is love." While being, as Packer says, "one of the most tremendous utterances in the Bible," it has also been so thoroughly misunderstood and misused that what should be the most wondrous view possible, as if seen from the top of the world, instead in the hands of many, is like being caught down in a valley of sticky syrup.

However, before he examines the significant passages in John's first epistle, Dr. Packer begins his discussion with an important clarifying statement made by Paul in Romans.

"Now, hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us." [Romans 5:5](#)

As Packer notes, Paul uses the same word Luke used to outpour the Holy Spirit in Acts. It carries the idea of being *flooded* with God's love, not hidden away as some barely noticeable event, but a deep and overwhelming expression of his love. Packer then points out that the tense used in Greek (perfect) is a settled and completed state. God's love poured out on us is a completed, settled act. With that in mind, we should also notice the agent, the Holy Spirit. This is not something we do ourselves, something we must gin up or strive to be worthy of; it just is!

Why is this infilling with the love of God so important for Christians? The answer is in the thirteenth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where he explains the primacy of a heart filled with love and how a person with such a heart acts not only to God but amongst its brothers and sisters in Christ; it explains how the vertical (loving God) defines the horizontal (loving our fellow man). It is interesting, Packer notes, how Pentecostals and Charismatics focus on spiritual gifts like tongues and healing, which Paul argues all are not meant to have (some, some, some) while giving such short shrift to what should be every Christian's primary goal, the overwhelming love of God flowing out of their hearts to everyone around them. Dr. Packer laments this "cul-de-sac of new Corinthianism." Instead, we should follow Paul's example and remember what he told the Ephesians.

For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. [Ephesians 3:14-19](#)

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So, if we are supposed to be so filled with God's love that it becomes an essential part of our being, we should understand what that love is, especially in light of John's passages in which he says, "God is love." To assist us, Dr. Packer makes two important statements that clarify and balance our consideration of John's passages.

- First. He reminds us that these statements, no matter how wonderful and awe-inspiring they appear to be, are not the complete truth about God. Instead, they are summary statements, much like Jesus summarized the law in [Matthew 22:37-40](#).

"And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"

Packer goes on to use two similar biblical statements to illustrate John's approach in his "God is love" passages: "God is spirit" ([John 2:24](#)) and "God is light" ([1 John 4:5](#)). He can make these valid comparisons because the same person, the Apostle John make all of these statements.

- Second. While these declarations of John are not the complete truth about God, they are for us as Christians all we need to know. John's statement means "that his [God's] love finds expression in everything he says and does." In other words, God will never be unloving to us, his children. So "God is love to us—holy, omnipotent love—at every moment and event of daily life. Even when we cannot see the why and the wherefore of God's dealings, we know that there is love in and behind them, and so we can always rejoice, even when, humbly speaking, things are going wrong. We know that the true story of our life, when known, will prove to be, as the hymn says, 'mercy from first to last'—and we are content." Festal Song, W. H. Walter, 1825-1893.

How shall we meet those eyes?
Ours on Himself we'll cast
And own ourselves the Saviour's prize,
Mercy from first to last.

Now that Packer has helped us deal with the context of John's great statements, he defines God's love, not just circumscribe it ("showing in general terms how and when it operates"). Instead, Packer expands our understanding of the concept by saying:

God's love is an exercise of his goodness toward individual sinners whereby, having identified himself with their welfare, he has given his Son to be their Savior and now brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relation.

He then proceeds to disassemble his statement and explain why God's love is an exercise of his goodness, especially of his goodness toward sinners, and how, as a covenant relationship, it binds together both parties in a deep, abiding, and eternal relationship.

Packer finishes the chapter by fleshing out this explanation. However, I should point out a clarification, which I must admit was influenced by my study of the book [Megashift](#) by James Rutz. One point that Rutz makes that I both agree with and find relevant at this juncture is "while God's unfathomable love loved us while we were yet sinners, we (those of us who have accepted God's Son as our Lord and Savior and have been born again by the action and work of the Holy Spirit) are no longer sinners, but saints."

Did you flinch at that statement? I am not surprised. I did when I first heard it. Despite that, it is true. Yes, we continue to sin. We agree with the Apostle John, who said, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." ([1 John 1:8](#)). But there is a significant difference, well beyond semantics, between a saint who sins and sinner in need of salvation. We are no longer sinners, defined by our continuing separation from God, by our ongoing sinful rebellion, but saints, albeit struggling saints in constant need of forgiveness, who are "working out our salvation in fear and trembling", but saints all the same.

I believe this is a significant distinction and enables us to better understand God's love and why, when Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, he began his example by addressing God as Father. As the Father loves the Son, so he loves us, and since he loved us while we were sinners, how much more is his love shed

Meditation on Chapter 12: The Love of God

upon us now that we are saints? We are his adopted children, called out from our former life to be a new creation in Christ Jesus our Lord, a saint of God. Isn't that the most wonderful, marvelous, stupendous thing you could imagine?

So, with that wondrous truth ringing in your soul, may your day be filled with grace and peace, and may the love of God find lasting purchase in the deep recesses of your heart, filling, changing, empowering, and uplifting your life into the glorious company of the saints of God.

Chapter 13: The Grace (Gift) of God

Today's theme: God's greatest gift, salvation through grace.

Grace is a gift. You can't buy it, you can't earn it, and you don't deserve it. It is unbelievable! If the Bible is clear on anything, grace is God's act alone. Gifts are not gifts unless given, and God gave them—see [John 3:16](#)—but to make sure the point isn't lost, I said it.

Scriptural background: Titus 2:11 "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared."

It almost sounds like Paul is saying it materialized out of nowhere, and in a sense, it did for all but a small segment of humanity. I love the image of grace "bringing" salvation, as if carrying it to our souls, propelled by the love of the one who sent it on its way. Sometimes, when I think of the Holy Spirit, I think of the Third Person of the Trinity as the embodiment of the Grace of God the Father acting in our lives.

[Ephesians 2:8-9](#) "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

This verse helps me whenever I want to get mad at God. After all, I am only tempted to get mad because I believe I deserve something I am not getting. What would that be? I deserve nothing and receive everything from God by the grace of his love. Since salvation is worked out to the end of my lifetime, this grace supports my whole life, and none of my works "earns" me anything now; I have no room to boast. Those who argue about rewards and storing treasure in heaven must remember that it is there and post-resurrection, not here and now. Now, all is by the gift of grace, even my ability to sustain my efforts at my sanctification. It's a good thing, too, because if it depended on me, I would hate to think about the result.

Quotes for the week

"In this awfully stupendous manner, at which Reason stands aghast, and Faith herself is half confounded, was the grace of God to man at length manifested." Richard Hurd (1720–1808). *Sermons*. Vol. ii. p. 287.

You cannot reason out grace, and most of the time, it is hard to see even through the eyes of faith, but stop all of the chatterings, and there it is, right in front of you, undeserved but yours from God, just the same.

"This is Daddy's bedtime secret for today: Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue." Eugene O'Neill (1888 - 1953) US dramatist. *The Great God Brown*. 1926.

I love this simple truth so poignantly expressed...grace is God's glue that puts our broken lives back together. So, remember this: grace is what holds you together. It might be useful at this point to remember the words of Paul to the Athenians: "In him, we live and move and have our being as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'" [Acts 17:28](#)

"The fast pace of our lives makes it difficult for us to find grace in the present moment, and when the simple gifts at our fingertips cease to nourish us, we have a tendency to crave the sensational." MacRina Wiederkehr. *A Tree Full of Angels: Seeing the Holy in the Ordinary*. Harper, San Francisco. 1995

Most of God's grace is whispered to us, though there are moments of profound shouting, like when I missed that car careening into my lane. However, God's loving whispers get so easily drowned out by the cacophony of modern existence, one advantage our earlier brethren had over us, though I venture most of us fail to see it. This is one of the reasons why I don't go to our church retreats. They are private Christian parties and praise meetings, not true retreats, moments of deep silence (doesn't retreat mean what it says?) that allow me to hear God's grace-filled whispers. We have been deafened and need to learn how to hear again.

"In life as in the dance: grace glides on blistered feet." Alice Abrams. Carolyn Warner. *The Last Word: A Treasury of Women's Quotes*.

This makes me think of what God endures for his offerings of loving grace and how we so often spurn his gift or, worse yet, drag it through the sinful mud of our lives. Disrespect is rampant, which I see whenever I garner a quiet moment and think about it. Remember when you get upset because your efforts at being

Concern: Can we humble ourselves to accept God's grace, the essence of agape, God's love in action?

graceful seem unappreciated. Also, remember that grace is always rooted in sacrifice. Think about that and appreciate God's gift of grace and our lack.

Concern: Can we humble ourselves to accept God's grace, the essence of agape, God's love in action?

If you are too proud to accept charity, where can the grace of God make its purchase in your life? I would probably look at this as the greatest fall pride has gone before.

"I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." [Romans 9:15](#) looking to [Exodus 33:19](#)

1. How does this idea that God has no obligation to show mercy or compassion strike you? How do you reconcile this with God's love (agape)?

At the root of our fallen nature (still with us, a part of the old man) is the desire and demand to be in control, including God and how, when, and where he acts in our lives. We are saved, so we can demand and expect God to give us what we want. We throw God's promises in his face as if we deserve what we demand from him.

Reconciling this is hard, but we must remember that even though God has no obligation (even our best efforts are still tainted by sin), he is not arbitrary or capricious but a loving Father who works everything out for our good and fulfills HIS purpose for our lives. That last thing is what sticks in our throats—his purpose, not ours—we are not the potter; we are the clay.

"Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens." [Romans 9:18](#)

2. This carries the previous thought one step further. Does this go against your ingrained sense of fairness? Do you feel God is being unfair? How do you come to terms with this scripture?

This is where the rubber of our submission meets the road of God's will. The "buts" ring out. "It's not fair" echoes across history. How could God love (agape—sacrifice for, not feel all gooey about) Jacob and hate Esau? This is where militant atheists, like the late Christopher Hitchens, reach their Waterloo. They refuse to bend their knee *to what, from their perspective*, is an overbearing, demanding, unfair God.

Most Christians avoid this passage, and others like it, because they knock down their construct of God, of who they believe God is. The whole purpose of this study, this theological exercise, is to let God define himself, whether we like that definition or not, and then for us to deal with what we have learned. We can stop at any time, but to whom much is given (or I would paraphrase "to those who ask for much"), much is expected. Your choice, your knee to bend or not to bend, and there are only two ways to deal with this verse: avoid/reject its implications or bend the knee in submission (that doesn't mean you have to like it—I don't) and wait for God to work it out for you. He may not. He didn't for Job, and Job shut his mouth and bent his knee. I will say it again: it's your choice. I have made mine; my knee is bent. Christopher Hitchens died knee unbent and is paying the price of his decision. You?

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To lay aside our concept of "my rights" and our rugged individualism and accept the grace and mercy of God as our path to salvation.

We are Americans, and as such, we have been molded in the culture of the individual. Wait for it; it is the water in which we swim. If there were an anthem for this cultural mandate, it would be Frank Sinatra's song "My Way," with his fist pointing to heaven, saying, "I did it my way!" That is the distortion. The truth is that we are individuals and that our uniqueness matters to God. This is one of the radical differences of Christianity, especially over the eastern forms of religious and philosophical belief that require the destruction/death of the individual and, as such, God's unique creation that began with one individual: Adam. Think of it as submitted individualism or submitted uniqueness, if you will. We are not clones to God.

Chapter 13: The Grace (Gift) of God

We live in post-Christian, pagan times. As a result, pagan ideas, concepts, and modes of thinking have begun to permeate cultural/social and sometimes even our existence. As Christians committed to knowing God, we are discipleship-bound to purge, as well as we can, those influences from our lives, remembering the command of [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](#). "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing *every thought* into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

That hits this study's heart, "bringing every thought into captivity." Did you feel resistance rise at that demand of obedience? While it is subdued, it never completely leaves me. It is endemic to the "old man" I am stuck with until I die and am released. How do I deal with that? As an athlete, I think of him as my training partner, the one who will always challenge me at every turn, against whom I can chart my progress or my "backsliding," as the Baptists say.

1. Why is Packer's point about God's grace being a personal activity instead of "celestial electricity" so important? Consider your view of the sacraments of the Church, especially communion, concerning this insight. Consider how this makes Christianity different from Wicca or witchcraft.

(p. 129-129) Only personal activity can be connected to love, which, along with agape, is a personal sacrificial activity. Grace's root is agape. It also speaks against some people's view of the Holy Spirit as a form of "celestial electricity."

As to sacraments, it speaks against the ritual being the key, as if the ritual "plugged you in," much like following the ritual in Wicca was the activating force. Instead, it puts everything back onto the grace of God in action. It is not our act, but his, that gives communion (and the bread and wine) its meaning and power.

2. What seems to be at the root of many people's lack of appreciation of the true meaning of grace?

(pp. 129-132) The failure stems from a wrong belief about the relationship between God and mankind that is so fundamental that people don't even realize they have gotten it wrong. Packer deals with four truths that need to be understood but are not, resulting in four problems.

- **Moral ill-desert of man**—we are not fundamentally good
- **Retributive justice of God**—God gives us what we deserve
- **Spiritual Impotence of man**—we cannot save ourselves
- **Sovereign freedom of God**—God is not beholden to anyone but himself

3. Packer calls the first problem of grace "The moral ill-desert of man." Can you rephrase that into something more meaningful to you? With this in mind, what is modern man's fundamental problem?

(p. 129-130) We are a sow's ear masquerading as a silk purse.

We lie to ourselves, excusing every failure, shortcoming, and outright evil as little peccadilloes while magnifying even the smallest virtues as towering accomplishments. Simply put, we will not face the music. Instead, we dissemble at every turn, pulling an Obi-Wan Kenobi on ourselves: "You are not acting that badly; that wasn't evil; you deserved that pleasure"—think of the McDonald's slogan, "You deserve a break today." We believe it with a wave of the hand and proper rationalization. After all, we lie to ourselves, "I am fundamentally a good person."

Underneath it all is the denial that God's demands are legitimate. Even if we are Christians and give God some of our due, we refuse to deal with the magnitude of what God requires.

4. What concept of justice does mankind often use to try and negate God's retributive justice? What problems does this create?

(130-131) Toleration and denying absolute requirements are the key concepts, and true moral virtue and being "intolerant" by making moral demands are the only true evils. God is like us and feels the same way, being the epitome of tolerance. This leads to a lack of accountability where no one makes real moral demands. This begins our slide down the slippery slope of social decay, eventually leading to societal collapse.

Conversely, this approach leads to hostility toward wholesomeness since overt goodness is a living indictment of everything those who tolerate evil in themselves and others stand for. Why do you think so many people absolutely and irrationally hate Tim Tebow?

5. How does much of our modern churchmanship reflect an ancient pagan approach to a relationship with God? How does this insight affect the legitimacy of the teachings of prosperity and success in the Christian Church?

(p. 131) Paganism was a ritualistically works-based approach to God, in essence, trying to bribe their way into acceptance. We can fix the problem by saying the right words (liturgies) and performing the right rituals (sacraments), believing that will force God into a corner where he cannot decently say no to us. It is not the heart that matters but following the right program and performing the right ritual acts.

The whole foundation of the prosperity argument, whether it is prospering financially or with health or success, is that because you are (or claim to be) a Christian, God must respond to your demands. After all, didn't he promise you all this? Aren't you a King's kid? So, claim the blessing. It's yours by right—isn't it?

6. Contrary to the assertions of paganism, what is God's "job"?

(p. 131-132) Paganism, even Christian paganism, argues that "God will forgive—that's his job." This is not true, as Romans 9:16 strongly states, "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." God's job is to be God and, as such, to act according to his will for his reasons, not ours. He is sovereign, and the choice of grace is his and his alone. He is never required to act and only does so by his own choice for his purpose. That he has chosen to love you and me is a mystery beyond comprehension, but it is his sovereign act alone. P.S. God does not "fall in love" overwhelmed by the beloved (me); he chooses to love.

7. What truth does Isaac Watts advance about us in his famous hymn?

(p. 133) We are fundamentally, utterly lost and hopeless, and by grace alone, we are saved (My soul obeys the sovereign call...A guilty, weak, and helpless worm, Into thy hands I fall). It is Christ who is "My Savior, and my all.")

8. What does Packer say God's grace is the source of? What implication does that have for your life?

(p. 133-134) God's grace is the source of the pardon of sin. Grace justifies us.

It relieves us of the burden of our salvation and enables us to pursue holiness for its own sake and not as a means to get accepted by God. This is freeing. We can focus on becoming like Christ instead of constantly trying to get God to accept us. The difference can be subtle but significant. Instead of trying to be what God expects so God will accept us, God has accepted us so we can try to be what God expects, and if we fail, he does not abandon us; he corrects us and sends us out to try again. It depends on Him, not us, for us to be sustained by His grace, not what we earn through our actions.

There is nothing like pursuing holiness when the everlasting arms eternally support you.

9. How is grace tied into the plan of salvation and the perseverance of the believer?

(p. 134-136) Grace drives the plan of salvation, which began in eternity before the first act of creation and will continue forever as we go from never-ending grace to grace.

I would add to Packer's references [Philippians 1:6](#) "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." We persevere because Christ perseveres with us, sustaining us. [1 Corinthians 1:7-9](#)

10. How does Packer address the complaint that emphasizing grace produces moral laxity or complacency?

(p. 137) I love Packer's little equation: "Doctrine is grace, and ethics is gratitude," or we are saved by grace and respond by acting morally in gratitude for that grace, not to earn it.

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I would add, however, that cheap grace is a concern and Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a seminal book by that title. In addition, the Epistle of James speaks to this very problem. While we are not saved by our works, but by grace, our works show that grace has saved us.

11. What consistent fault in our approach to God is made remarkably clear in this section? How do you avoid that trap?

We try to please God by acting acceptably as if we could earn God's love, and as is often the case, it is a form of bargaining, hoping that by doing/saying the right thing, then maybe this concern or that circumstance will go our way. Even if we give lip service to the truth that we can't save ourselves, we generally believe we earn something from God by what we do after our new birth—that, in some small measure, he is beholden to us. While I am not talking about the legitimate expectations any child has of their father, in this case, our heavenly Father, we need to remember what the Father expected from his only begotten Son and the Son's response in the garden, "Not my will, but thine be done."

I am reminded of the bitterness I have heard from Christians over the years. When tragedy befalls them, they rail at God, saying, "I sacrificed so much for Him, and he let this happen to me. It's not fair." They believed they deserved better; they *earned* it. Sorry to disagree, but they didn't; we don't.

Every new breath, the next joy, or any good thing is a grace gift from God. Because he sends the rain on everyone, evil and good, we begin to expect it as our right. It's like when you stop to give someone a ride because you have an extra moment; later, they get all in a huff if you pass them by, even if you could not at that time afford to stop.

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Fourteen: *God The Judge*. Think about what is reassuring and frightening about God as our judge as we examine the magistrature (jurisdiction of a magistrate) of God.

We now begin moving into the book's difficult (for most people) section. However, it is important to note that Packer first builds the foundation of God's wisdom, truth, love, and grace before moving into his judgment, wrath, severity, and jealousy. Over the years, I lost most of those who dropped out of the study in the next four chapters. Everyone relishes the love of God, but very few embrace the rest. Prepare your hearts for the *whole* gospel.

Goal: To learn to accept God's grace by extending it to others.

Using God's gracious salvation as your starting point, put into practice at some point this week the demand of Jesus to extravagantly forgive someone who has offended or hurt you.

The little slights are relatively easy to forgive, but the real test of Jesus' response to Peter about how often we should forgive ([Matthew 18:22](#)), is forgiving extravagantly, forgiving those who hurt us deeply, especially if they aren't sorry they did it. God forgave us, died for us while we were still sinners. Can we do any less?

Meditation on Chapter 13: The Grace (Gift) of God

We now move from everyone's favorite topic, the love of God, to the Reformation's favorite attribute, the grace of God. It is appropriate that Packer addressed God's attributes in this order since his grace flows out of his love.

Dr. Packer begins this chapter by stating that it is common within Christian churches "to call Christianity a religion of grace." He then notes that grace, far from being a sort of impersonal "celestial electricity," is instead a "personal activity—God operating in love toward people." That statement explains the order of the last two chapters since the grace of God flows inexorably out of his love in action. Packer immediately notes what the student of Greek learns very quickly, that both *agape* (love) and *charis* (grace) are primarily Christian words, pulled from the dustbin of Greek usage and made distinctly prominent. From there, Dr. Packer makes a damning statement: "...there do not seem to be many Christians in our churches who believe in grace."

Grace, at its heart, passes on the acclaim (doesn't hold it for oneself) as exemplified by Paul, "*By the grace of God*

I am what I am.” [1 Corinthians 15:10](#). Packer then states that the church is *full of people who do not live those words*, instead *giving mere lip service* to their intent. He lays the root cause at misbelief, at taking for granted at such a deep, root level of their lives that they don’t even question their failure, instead going forward without questioning what is necessary for true faith to sprout and grow in their heart’s soil. He then divides that necessary understanding into four basic truths, against which the spirit of the current age rails with all of its fervor. Packer argues that one cannot grasp the essential meaning of grace without accepting these four truths. They are:

- **Moral ill-desert of man**—we are not fundamentally good
- **Retributive justice of God**—God gives us what we deserve
- **Spiritual Impotence of man**—we cannot save ourselves
- **Sovereign freedom of God**—God is not beholden to anyone but himself

Mankind’s failure and impotence intersect God’s justice and sovereignty. In the end, understanding grace requires the submission of our wills and the understanding of ourselves to God, something man, since the fall, has always had problems doing. This rebellion is echoed through history by the hearts that assert, “I don’t need your help or charity,” and is rooted in the genesis of the self-made person, the icon of American individualism. Let me qualify by saying that I am not talking about taking responsibility for your life and actions or disrespecting hard work and industry. With the right heart, those things are necessary to meet the demands of God. As Paul says:

Therefore, my dear ones, as you have always obeyed [my suggestions], so now, not only [with the enthusiasm you would show] in my presence but much more because I am absent, work out (cultivate, carry out to the goal, and fully complete) your own salvation with reverence and awe and trembling (self-distrust, with serious caution, tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against temptation, timidly shrinking from whatever might offend God and discredit the name of Christ). [Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while [b]effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight Amplified [Philippians 2:12-13](#)

Work out (the word carries the meaning of intense, uninterrupted labor carried on to completion) your salvation. Be responsible, work hard, and be industrious in all your efforts to perfect your life in Christ. That part most people can respect. Yes, I have to accept responsibility and make the effort. What is skipped over is the second half of the verse and the qualifier in the next verse.

“...with reverence and awe and trembling (self-distrust, with serious caution, tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against temptation, timidly shrinking from whatever might offend God and discredit the name of Christ).” Pretty powerful stuff there. “[Not in your strength] for it is God who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight.” We can’t take credit for it because God sustains and enables us according to his will.

The essence of this grace that God gives us, his effective work within us, Packer notes, is undeserved. It cannot be earned. Instead, it reflects a state of being, which, to me, is one of the hardest things said in the Gospels:

Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So, when you have done everything you were told, you should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.” [Luke 17:9-10](#)

Instead, we want credit for what we have done. We want to be elevated, rewarded, and told how great we are. We want to be acknowledged as the victor and given props for our efforts. Instead, when we use the street’s parlance, it appears God disses us.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God. [Ephesians 2:8](#)

It is a gift. It is grace. It is not you. It is God. No wonder when we sing Isaac Watts’s amazing song, we no longer sing its fourth verse.

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A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
In thy hands I fall;
Thou art the Lord, my righteousness,
My Savior, and my all.

Watts says we are worms. Are we? How does that jibe with my argument last week that we are all saints, not sinners? If you thought that great, because that is a good, right, and proper question, it shows me that you have been taking these lessons to heart. The quick answer is attitude. Saints know that they are adopted by grace into the family of God and have been rescued from the orphanage of sin and death. A sinner struggles to find their own way in the world, trying to make their own family, their own identity. A saint knows they once were lost, but now they are found. A saint understands that as guilty sinners, we fall as helpless worms into the arms of God, who weaves about us a cocoon of grace and then empowers us to be reborn into butterflies of light, his adopted children and brothers of Christ Jesus, our Lord.

A saint is no longer a worm, but it is good to remember that from which we were rescued. What I argued against last week was not allowing that orphanage of sin and death to define us even after the rebirth through grace into butterflies of light. The song does not say we stay helpless worms; only that is where we start until we fall into the hands of God, the loving Father who fashions us from darkness into light. Our fundamental nature has changed, as Paul says so gloriously.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [2 Corinthians 5:17](#)

and again

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. [Colossians 6:15](#)

It is not our efforts (circumcision—or its rejection) but God’s adoption (our new creation) that matters. Glory be! That flips everything upside down, doesn’t it? So, are you a saint or a sinner? Are you a butterfly or a worm? Joshua told the children of Israel at the Jordan River crossing, “Choose this day who you will serve.” So, who is it? Yourself or God, it’s your choice. I’ve made mine and have been testing these Butterfly [capitalized on purpose] wings for over 35 years. Make your choice while you still can.

May the grace of God fill your soul unto life everlasting, and may his sustaining grace carry you through each moment of every day, nourishing you through the dry times, uplifting you during the down times, and ultimately bringing you into the habitation prepared for you from before the foundation of all creation.

A Personal Witness

I was saved (I knew I had, by my conscious decision, accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior) in the early summer of 1976. However, I would not have been alive, but for the grace of God, to reach that point in my life. I know of four instances and possibly numerous others where God saved me from death. Here is one harrowing example:

When you are twenty-two, you think you will live forever, even in the middle of a war. You tell yourself that death will always knock on the other guy's door. Losing my brother in the year (1968) in the Vietnam mini-Tet offensive only brought home the pain of loss, not the reality of dying.

Being in the Air Force and stationed in Thailand only helped distance the possibility of death from my doorstep. My biggest problems were boredom, fatigue, and venereal disease, in that order. The planes took off; the planes came back. Once in a while, there was an accident. We lost no planes to missions and only two men to a take-off malfunction that blew a fire control helicopter out of the sky when a B-52 nosed into the runway and exploded a few minutes later.

The most violence I got to see was on the screen at the beach theater or during an occasional drunken brawl. That helped make the life-and-death situation so unreal to me when it happened.

It was about twenty miles from the airbase at Utapao, where I was stationed, to Sattahip, the closest real town and Thailand's only deep-water port. The U.S. had constructed it to transport the bombs for the B-52s flying out of the airbase.

Meditation on Chapter 13: The Grace (Gift) of God

If you wanted to do anything interesting, Sattahip was the only place to go. Newland, the locally regulated red-light district, was closer, but that only had bars and women, and its ambiance was strictly warehouse neon. For clothes, jewelry, local crafts, or anything else, Sattahip was your only choice unless you could find an overnight pass to Bangkok (I say overnight because we worked 12 hours a day/6 days a week).

There were three ways to get to Sattahip: taxi, regular bus, or baht (5 cents) buses. A taxi was expensive except for rare trips, even in this relatively cheap economy. The regular bus was irregular at best, and there was no way of knowing what condition an open seat might be in. That left the baht bus as the least expensive and generally quickest option. Baht buses were Toyota or Datsun (now Nissan) pickups with a sun cab and seats along both sides of the rear bed. You hailed one going by, gave the driver your baht, and rode till you wanted to get off. The roundtrip into Sattahip cost 2 baht, though we usually tipped the driver another baht each way.

During the early part of my tour, I always went into town with a buddy, never alone, but after a few months, when I had picked up enough of the language to get around, I would take a baht bus into town by myself.

One of my roommates had been a freelance photographer for several magazines, and he drove my interest in photography by telling me I had a natural eye. We worked out an economical relationship with a local photo shop for developing and proof sheets. I regularly visited Sattahip to look at proofs and work on finished prints in the darkroom with the owner.

On one of these trips, no different at first than many others I had taken, everything stepped out of the routine and into the place reserved for nightmares. Nothing was ever the same for me after that.

I caught a baht bus in the late afternoon at the base's main gate and headed into town. There were no other Americans on the ride. In the front seat was a large Thai woman holding a full basket in her lap. As I got into the back, I said, "Sattahip?" The driver shook his head yes and pulled away.

At first, I was alone, but as we headed down the road, the truck would frequently stop to pick up and discharge passengers. About halfway to Sattahip, there is a crossroads intersection with a busy marketplace. The cross street to the south went to an American Army base. About three miles from the market, the road passes through a relatively deserted countryside section for about four or five miles. The area is gently rolling hills, and the road is almost straight as it parallels the ocean about two miles inland. It is an area of large tapioca farms that stretch on seemingly forever, similar to some of the orange orchards in Florida, my home state at the time.

I was riding along this stretch of highway with three passengers: the lady up front with the full basket of clothes, a young boy about 8 or 9, and a teenage girl, his sister. Thais drive on the left side of the road, like the British, but some of their cars have steering wheels on the same side as ours. This truck had American steering, which meant the driver was on the vehicle's curbside. I was riding next to the tailgate, on the passenger side, with the center white line racing behind me. The boy was next to me on the right, and the girl was opposite.

It was a hot, humid day, and the rush of wind in the open cabin felt good. I was leaning against the rear roof post and watching the road rush out from under the truck's rear. The tires were humming a steady note, and it was mildly hypnotic. It was another boring ride into Sattahip, or so I thought.

The late afternoon sun was to our rear. I don't know if I noticed it coming up behind us or just realized it was there when its shadow crossed the edge of my vision on the road behind us. A two-door dark blue Datsun sedan had pulled up behind us, carrying a driver and passenger. Noticing that he was following close, I snapped back from my lazy, drifting to a sudden thought of, "What's going on here?"

As I looked at the two men, the car slowly pulled out to pass us. At the same time, the passenger, because that vehicle was a British model, would be on the center line opposite me as they passed. The man leaned over and reached behind the driver's seat, bringing into the front seat a lever-action rifle. Resting the barrel on the window sill, he cycled through the action, ejecting a shell out the top while looking straight at me through the windshield.

Chapter 13: The Grace (Gift) of God

I turned and looked at the Thai girl across from me and she said in broken English, "He shoot you." My heart started racing. There was nowhere to go, and I was unarmed except for a pocket knife. It was a very strange feeling, not having any control over what was occurring. I felt like a spectator, watching things unfold from a detached distance, while at the same time being pumped full of adrenalin, ready to flee but having nowhere to go. I just sat there staring incredulously as the pursuing vehicle edged forward.

You may have heard how, in times of grave danger, things seem to go into slow motion, and your whole life flashes before your eyes. Well, time did distort, and there was a strange duality where everything was going along at normal speed, but at the same time, it seemed to take forever to happen. Both vehicles were doing about 50 mph, yet the car seemed to crawl forward toward us.

Just as the car pulled almost close enough that the passenger could get a clear shot at me and he was lifting his rifle, we crested a low hill. Suddenly, a bus came in the other direction. With the bus's horn blaring, the Datsun braked and swerved back in behind us.

Here is the God part. For the previous two or three miles, we hadn't passed a single vehicle coming in the other direction, but now, unbelievably, there was a steady stream of vehicles coming in the other direction. The Datsun tried several times to pull up beside us. He would pull out into a gap and then be forced to swerve back in. Pull out; serve back in; the barrel of the rifle resting on his window sill the whole time, waiting for a chance. Several concerns rushed through my mind, primarily that the baht bus driver might stop for someone or let the woman in the cab get off. "Please," I implored God, "Don't let anyone get off or want to get on." If we stopped, I was as good as dead. I had already told the girl and her brother, "No stop!"

Miraculously, the line of traffic kept the car from pulling alongside of us all the way into the outskirts of Sattahip. As we turned into town and the car went on, the passenger used his fingers like a gun, pretending to shoot at me twice as they disappeared down the road.

I am a living testament to the truth that God's grace has been with us all along, from before time began and through every moment of life, rooted in the willingness of the Son to die, always steering us to that penultimate moment when we, at a time chosen by God, finally confront our eternal destiny and are born again. Thank you, God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the gift of grace and life eternal.

Meditation on Chapter 13: The Grace (Gift) of God

Chapter 14: God the Judge

Today's theme: Being willing to face the music, we accept God as our judge.

Not only do we resist God judging us, we don't like the idea of anyone sitting in judgment over us. In the inner-city and gang cultures, they call it dissing, which started as insulting someone but has since expanded to mere criticism, and all judgment is criticism. When you judge someone, you criticize them; you question them, bringing out their defenses. We excuse ourselves, and it began with Adam, who immediately excused himself and blamed Eve, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" [Genesis 3:12](#), and it hasn't changed.

Scriptural background: [Acts 10:42](#) "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead."

Sometimes, we forget that the Father appointed Jesus, the Son, as our judge. It is Christ who will separate the sheep from the goats, the saints from the damned. [Matthew 25:31-45](#) Many refuse to believe that Jesus would do such a thing, that he is loving and forgiving and will excuse it all, but the Bible paints a radically different picture.

Quotes for the week

"We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, quoted by Glenn van Ekeren. *Speaker's Sourcebook I: Quotes, Stories, & Anecdotes for Every Occasion*. Prentice Hall Press, 1993.

Potential matters to coaches, mentors, and our own opinion of ourselves, showing the possibilities, but in the end, people see what we do and have done and determine their opinion. All too often, we color our actions by our potential and make everything better than it deserves to be. We need to remember that from God's perspective, to whom much is given, much is expected—the potential must become the actual, and we must persist to the end. [Luke 12:48](#), [Mark 13:13](#), [Revelation 2:26](#)

"Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan Press On! has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race." Calvin Coolidge [Philippians 3:13-14](#)

"Good judgment comes from experience and experience—well, that comes from poor judgment." Cousin Woodman.

We must learn from our mistakes. It is our primary learning method. That is why God, our Father, does not condemn us but corrects us. He expects us to learn from those mistakes and change. [Proverbs 10:8](#), [Proverbs 17:10](#), [Hebrews 12:10-11](#)

"Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to error that counts." Nikki Giovanni. "Of Liberation," *Black Feeling/Black Talk/Black Judgment*, 1970.

Dealing with our sins and failures is difficult, but how we respond through admission, repentance, atoning for what we have done, and changing what we do in the future is what is expected of the child of God. God has and continues to give us **so many** chances. Don't waste the opportunities; eventually, they, like time, will run out.

Concern: That we will use our measure rather than God's measuring rod to set the standard of judgment.

Part of what this study is about is dealing with God's measuring rod. It applies everywhere, from how we think about and understand who He is to how we think about and understand ourselves. God does not grade on a curve, no matter how much we may want him to. He is not like us. [Numbers 23:19](#)

Concern: That we will use our measure rather than God's measuring rod to set the standard of judgment.

A mini-survey of judgment and its use in Scripture

“For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” [Hebrews 10:30-31](#)

This obscure passage (for some students, this is the first time they have ever seen it) is really scary if you think about it. “It is a terrifying thing” NKJ, NAS; “fearful thing” ASV, ESV; “dreadful thing” NIV; fearful (formidable and terrible) Amplified. When you think about Jesus’ statement in [John 10:28-29](#), he explicitly states there is no escape from the hand of God, which in one context is utterly reassuring, but at the same, a truly terrifying thought.

Word study: judge/judgment

1. The Greek root biblical word is: (noun) - *krima* meaning dispute, decision, verdict, judgment; (verb) – *krino* meaning separate, judge, consider, decide.

Used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) extends its meaning to punish, wrangle, vindicate, and obtain justice for (e.g., [Gen 15:14](#), [30:6](#), [Deut. 32:36](#), [2 Sam 19:9](#), [Ps. 54:3](#), [Jer 5:28](#)).

When we say extend, we don't mean change but flesh out what might be understood by the original Hebrew readers. Remember, the Septuagint was translated using Koine (common trade language) Greek in stages between the 3rd and 2nd century BCE in Alexandria, Egypt. Both Philo and Josephus ascribed divine inspiration to its 72 Hebrew authors. King Ptolemy II originally commissioned them to complete the Torah (5 books of Moses) but later completed the whole OT. Most OT quotes in the NT are taken from the Septuagint (which makes sense—since it was written in Greek (NT) and uses the already translated Greek OT when quoting).

It eventually came to mean to rule, and he who rules and judges brings salvation, peace, and deliverance to the persecuted and oppressed ([Deuteronomy 10:18](#)).

Interesting how we want to embrace the “brings salvation, peace, and deliverance to the persecuted and oppressed” part but try to leave behind the ruling and judging that make it possible.

“Even though men may sit in judgment, it is God who is Lord and Judge.” ([Deuteronomy 1:17](#), [Romans 13:1-7](#)).

Remember, in Romans, Paul uses Rome as his context, a pagan government system, while speaking about all earthly government authority.

2. The NT adds the meanings distinguish, give preference, resolve, approve, speak or think ill of, bring to trial, condemn, punish, and dispute.

In contrast to speaking or thinking, this sense of giving preference or approval is directly tied to Jesus’ admonition about judging. [Matthew 7:1-3](#)

Even if it is condemnation, God's judgment is seen as just ([Rom 2:2](#), [3:8](#)).

God's judgment is unsearchable ([Rom 11:33](#)).

God's judgment is always near and should stir us to repentance ([Matt 10:28](#), [11:20](#), [12:41](#), [Luke 13:6](#)).

3. Under God's judgment, we are also called to judge each other ([1 Cor 5:12](#), [6:2](#) contrasted with [Mat 7:1](#)) but never arrogantly and always with our sacrifice in view.

Matthew 7:1 is probably the most misused statement of Jesus in the Bible and has been wrongly used against any questioning, discrimination between right and wrong, or calling any behavior or another into question. Without getting into a long dissertation, what it speaks against is the holier-than-thou attitude that does not connect with pain and suffering caused by necessary judgment AND being unwilling to have the tables turned on oneself, using the same strictness and interpretation of the rules.

Chapter 14: God the Judge

4. Think how [1 Cor 13](#) influences judgment. The key is understanding agape (personal self-sacrifice).

No anger, haughtiness, rudeness, or envy can be involved. Jesus wept over Jerusalem when he considered the coming judgment ([Luke 19:41-44](#)), and he is the judge, but then drives the moneylenders from the Temple with strong, accusing statements. [Luke 19:45-46](#) The contrast is instructive.

5. The one who bore sin for us now judges us ([2 Cor 5:21](#)), and true judgment comes when we reject him ([John 3:16](#), [11:25](#)).

C.S. Lewis always believed the gates of hell were locked on the inside to keep God, the one whom the residents still rejected, out. It is not just our sin that condemns us, though that is enough, but our *eternal* rejection of the only solution. What is the refrain? "There has to be another way." The curmudgeonly atheist Christopher Hitchens is a perfect example. This is taken from a [WND article](#) after his death.

Unlike many who won't let others below the surface of their intellectual arguments, Hitchens admitted that he didn't want there to be a god because he didn't want to be "under the permanent control and supervision of an unalterable celestial dictator." It's the "servile" and "masochistic" part of the human personality, he said, that wants to be "kicked around," controlled, and "told what to do."

Question: How are word studies such as this useful?

The answers will be personal but should at least touch on the fact that since we have already established the veracity and reliability of God's word, understanding the meaning of the words he uses and why we get at the nuances that sometimes elude us. This is especially true since most of us are using translations, and even if we have learned the original languages, we have to work at putting the text into the original readers'/writers' context.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To submit our hearts to the correction and judgment of God, in whom we trust and, in that trust, live and move and have our being

We must remember that trust is at the root of the meaning of faith. We cannot have faith in what we do not trust. For the believer, there is no reason to shrink back from the correction and judgment of God because in our faith and trust in him, we know, as Paul reminded the Romans, "that all things all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." [Romans 8:28](#) We either believe and trust that or we don't.

If there is one thing that our fallen human nature (the "old man") rebels against, it is allowing anyone, including God, to sit in judgment over us. We are quick to accept forgiveness, love, and the other "compassionate" virtues and attributes of God, but we bristle when someone brings up judgment. Against that, we will resist to the very core of our "old man." Even when we bow our knees to God, that old nature is still there, trying to resist. Accepting judgment from any source means giving up control and relinquishing choices since, by its very nature, judgment strips these things from us, which goes against our sinful self.

Yes, there are abuses, and yes, I am not talking about giving in to exploitation. However, we have to be careful not to use that as an excuse to avoid what God is trying to accomplish in or for us. Sometimes, he uses sinful men doing sinful things to accomplish his purposes (think Joseph and his brothers). [Genesis 50:20](#)

1. How is [Ecclesiastes 12:14](#) "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or bad" significant for the focus of this chapter (hint: look at "good or bad")?

(p. 138-140) God does not judge just the bad, though that is a certainty. He judges everything, including what we see as good. As Packer says: "The one basic certainty underlying all discussion of life's problems in Job, Ecclesiastes, and all the practical maxims of Proverbs is that "God will bring you to judgment."

[Ecclesiastes 11:9](#)

How difficult is that? Nothing gets past him; there will be/are no secrets. And remember, this is not just OT fear-mongering, as some claim. The New Testament is grounded in the certainty of the universal judgment and the assurance, given by Peter, that judgment begins with us, the Church, the children of God. [1 Peter 4:17](#)

2. How does the idea that not only does God see everything about you, even the hidden things, but He will bring everything into judgment affect your daily living? Answer in practical terms.

(p. 140-141) This answer will be highly personal, but for a Christian pursuing this study, it should include the idea that if God knows everything about me, then he also knows how serious I am about knowing Him—the purpose of this study. If you have gotten this far, it is time to accept that God is judging the sincerity of your efforts to know him. Practically speaking, you should either dive in with both feet or quit now (maybe return when you can better embrace the demands). You need to be hot or cold. Please remember what is said about the lukewarm in Revelations (in this context, I believe a half-hearted effort is a legitimate interpretation). [Revelations 3:16](#)

3. Packer lists four things that encompass the idea of a judge. What are they, and how do they relate to the character of God?

(p. 141-142) Four things put God as judge in context:

1. **Authority**—Judges have authority, and biblically, God has supreme authority as King of the World.
2. **Represent the good and right**—Judges stand for the moral order and biblically want right to triumph over wrong. God, as judge, loves the righteous and hates iniquity.
3. **Discerns truth using wisdom**—Judges weigh the facts and discern the truth, and God, as omniscient (knowing all facts) and the epitome of wisdom, knows the truth about everything. As the last phrase uttered by God in [Genesis 18:21](#) says, "...I will know."
4. **Sentence execution power**—God, the judge, not only has the authority to declare a verdict but also the power to carry out the sentence. As Packer notes, "God is his own executioner."

4. How do these four aspects of being a judge affect our study and your life? Deal with each one.

(p. 141-142) The life part of the answer will be highly personal. The study part should cover some aspects of the answers below.

Authority—God has the authority to examine our efforts to do what he has called us to do to determine how well we are living up to our commitments and his commands, especially the first commandment, which is at the root of how our lives should be lived.

Good & right—God alone determines the good and right, not us nor any created being. By His very nature, He defines what is good and what is not as anything that diminishes, distorts, or denies that essential goodness and rightness. Therefore, my morality, ethics, and all understanding of what makes them up comes from God and God alone, not the imaginings of mine or anyone else's heart.

Truth discerned by wisdom—What is the right or wise thing to do? God knows, and as much as I need to know to discern the truth in any given situation, he has supplied that in His Word. As we pursue this study and live out our lives, the reality is that our weaknesses and personal agendas cloud that understanding and distort the words to lean in the direction we want them to go.

Executing judgment—God will execute his judgment on us, but in doing so, we are assured that as our loving Father, everything he does is for our good. [Romans 8:28](#), [Hebrews 12:5-13](#)

5. What is the difference between judgment and retributive judgment? How does that affect your view of life and how you should live it?

(p. 142-144) Judgment, as a general principle, is a form of discernment of the right or wrong of an action.

Chapter 14: God the Judge

While it evidences the four things previously discussed, we have only dealt with it in a general way. However, when it comes to retribution (something justly deserved; recompense), we focus on the essence of God's nature as the judge of all creation when he acts "To reward good with good, and evil with evil..."

When we are judged according to our works, as Paul argues in Romans 2:6-11, we get what we deserve, which goes back to the OT principle of "an eye for an eye." [Exodus 21:23-25](#) This is retribution and, as Packer notes, "is the inescapable moral law of creation."

God's retributive nature guarantees "that all wrongs will be righted someday." Because of this, God can demand that vengeance belongs to him alone ([Romans 12:19](#)), and we can forgo the temptation to "take the law into our own hands." Thinking of the terribleness of that retribution can also assist us in moving ourselves to forgiveness and prayer for the ones who have wronged us.

Over the years, as I have talked to adamant nonbelievers, especially those claiming to be atheists, it is this aspect of God they cannot deal with. Ultimately, it settles upon their fallen nature's repulsion at being judged by anyone, much less God. Look back to number 5 in our earlier word study and look again at Christopher Hitchens' statement about his rejection of God.

Bend your knee, accept correction, and take your punishment, knowing that God will never use one ounce more than is absolutely necessary to accomplish the task. Done this way, as a repentant child of God, it is over, and God, as a loving father, will help you move on and turn that failure into the foundation for future success. The alternative is frightening.

6. Why is Jesus the just and perfect judge? What does this mean to you personally?

(p. 144-145) Packer notes that in the Anglican burial service, Jesus is addressed as "holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal," the one who "will separate the people one from another." [Matthew 25:32](#) As [John 5:27](#) notes, it is "because he is the Son of Man."

Though Packer doesn't address it here, I want to point out the argument in [Hebrews 2:14-18](#) where he is like us in every way (but without sin), which "in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things about God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." This makes him both savior and judge, as the Anglican service notes, but also one who understands our temptations and suffering and who can "sympathize with our weaknesses but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." [Hebrews 4:15-16](#)

We cannot say to Jesus, "You don't know what it was like." Personally, that leaves me with no excuse, but also with confidence that God understands and takes that into account as he corrects me and guides me into holiness.

7. How does Packer resolve the puzzling question of uniting forgiveness and justification with the opening of the Book of Life in [Revelation 20:11-15](#), when each man's recorded actions are exposed?

(p. 146) The opening of the Book of Life essentially exposes the identities of those who are saved and not thrown into the lake of fire. It opens the Book of Mystery, the mystery of redemption and creation itself. In [Psalm 139:16](#) it makes the point that "Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book, they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when there were none yet." God fashions our days in his book. [Revelation 20:12](#) tells us there are many books, of which only one is the Book of Life. Is this the Book of Life? I don't think it matters; they are all God's books. What does matter is that God fashions our days and already has those days recorded in His book.

The Book of Life is also mentioned in [Exodus 32:32](#); [Psalm 69:28](#), [Daniel 12:1](#); [Philippians 4:3](#); and [Revelation 3:5](#); [13:8](#); [17:8](#); [20:12](#); [20:15](#) and the [Revelation 13:8](#) passage could be interpreted that this book has existed from before creation (foundation of the world). The resolution comes that even we who are written in the book are judged, as Paul cautioned in [1 Corinthians 3:12-15](#) for using wood, hay, and stubble to build portions of our spiritual lives that will be burned away in the fire of testing/judgment. The key phrase is "he himself will be saved," going back to the Book of Life, in which his name is written; even though he suffers a loss, he is not condemned (re: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,

who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. [Romans 8:1](#)) Everything "according to the flesh" will be burnt away, so why waste so much effort on it now?

8. What is the terror of the Lord? How does this concept square with your image of forgiveness and a loving God?

(p. 146-147) Judgment before Christ = "the terror of the Lord." [2 Corinthians 5:11](#) We must never forget that none of us is fit to face Christ in judgment. As Paul laments in [Romans 7:14b-15](#), "...I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."

Paul was forgiven but also found he was still subject to his "old man," the fallen nature that accompanies us throughout the remainder of our lives, from which only death will completely free us. For all that he hated and did, he will stand judgment for alongside each one of us. That will be terrible and will harken to the statement in [Hebrews 10:30-31](#): "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is terrifying to fall into the hands of the living God."

But that judgment, because of our salvation in Jesus Christ, ends in eternal life, and its purpose is to strip from us all that is not holy and blameless so that we may be presented to the Son as an unblemished bride. [Ephesians 5:27](#)

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Fifteen: *The Wrath of God*. We will now consider the most difficult aspect of God's nature: his anger and wrath. While doing this, we **must not forget** the assurance of [Hebrews 12:5-6](#) "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and **do not lose heart when he rebukes you**, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.'"

Gird up your loins and do not falter through the next three chapters, for it is a marvelous blessing to come out the other side of this revelation of the nature of the God with whom we have to do. I often marvel at those who claim to be Full Gospel believers yet shrink back from the full revelation of the nature of God. Do not lose heart. Persevere to the end and receive what awaits you.

Goal: To always remember that God's judgments are just and true.

As Christians and children of God, we know His judgments are always for our betterment, not our destruction. God loves us. Remember the truth that every athlete knows, "No pain, no gain," and remind yourself that all God's correction is for your eternal well-being.

It boils down to trust: do you trust God or not? Close your ears to those who would malign God, who call into question his motives and loving, sacrificial nature. I often remind myself that Jesus, on the cross of Calvary, suffered the punishment for every sin, every act of rebellion (Try and get your mind around that!) and, in so doing, judges us with full knowledge of the consequences of every sin we are guilty of. He knows it all. He knows it more deeply than we can ever know. All that is left to say is, "Thank you, God, for your merciful, sacrificial love to me. I could never deserve it, but I trust you, and I say with Job, 'Though he slays me, I will hope in him...'" [Job 13:15](#)

Meditation on Chapter 14: God the Judge

We now move from grace to judgment, from God the loving Father, about whom songs are written extolling his graciousness, to God our judge, who can see the innermost workings and essence of our being.

Great God of wonders! all thy ways
Display the attributes divine;
But countless acts of pardoning grace
Beyond thine other wonders shine;

Chapter 14: God the Judge

Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?
Great God of Wonders – Samuel Davies (1723-1761)

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” [Hebrews 4:12](#)

Most of our public outpourings, which are best reflected in the songs we sing, shrink back from this aspect of God’s nature. The song *All My Soul to God I Raise* by Bortnianski and Dudley-Smith is a good example.

Graciously my sins forgive
Help me by Your truth to live
In Your footsteps lead me Lord
Joy renewed and hope restored
Knowing every sin forgiven
Learning all the ways of heaven
Mercies manifold extend
Not as judge but faithful friend
O my Saviour hear my prayer
Pluck my feet from every snare
Quietude be mine at last
Rest from all my guilty past

We seek a faithful friend who extends many varied mercies rather than a judge and, in so doing, diminishes one fundamental aspect of God’s nature at the expense of another. As Packer notes and our popular worship music reinforces, we want a God who is a Father, friend, helper, healer, giver of strength and encouragement, and generally supportive, good guy. However, Packer also notes, “There are few things stressed more strongly in the Bible than the reality of God’s work as a judge.”

Now, I know some people will immediately postulate that this judgment talk is Old Testament thinking and that we Christians live in the Church age, the age of grace. That is true; we live under grace, which Paul makes clear in his letter to the Galatians, but that doesn’t mitigate God’s role as judge. Think about Ananias and Sapphira ([Acts 5:1-10](#)), Elymas and his opposition to the gospel ([Acts 13:8-12](#)), or the Christians at Corinth at whose feet Paul laid the responsibility for their illnesses and death due to their not properly discerning the Lord’s Supper ([1 Corinthians 11:29-32](#)). Paul specifically talks about God’s judgment to the Corinthians. We could go on, but Ecclesiastes’ verses put it all into perspective.

“God will judge you...God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” [Ecclesiastes 11:9, 12:14](#)

Even the Nicene Creed, which is recited (however rote) in most liturgical churches and in some other settings, makes this significant point about the Son:

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

Yes, judgment, especially the judgment of God, is not a popular subject in today’s Christianity or the world at large. Anyone talking about hell and judgment is seen as decidedly radical and populating the fringe, and dare I say it, “unloving” and “judgmental.” It has gotten so bad that the great apologist for apostasy, retired Episcopal “Bishop” [John Shelby Spong](#), wrote the book [The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible’s Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love](#) in which he continued down his long-traveled road of the denial of any judgment by God, going so far as to deny even the historical understanding of theism itself, the idea that God possesses any personality or personhood. If God is not a person and takes no cognitive and rational action, then, of course, he cannot act as a judge, and sin has no absolute meaning. However, I find it oxymoronic that one who vehemently denies sin at every turn suddenly finds it relevant when it suits his twisted purpose (see his oxymoronic title as a sadly ironic slip of his tongue). Sadly, he died in 2021 without ever repenting of his heresies, and now he has been judged by God, using God’s requirements and not his.

The real issue, as I see it, is the statement of Paul in [Philippians 2:10-11](#)

“At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Spong and those who moved alongside him did everything possible to avoid the bent knee and confession of Lordship. Submission is unacceptable and absolutely to be avoided. Rather than agree with Job that God has all the rights, after all, he IS God, they want to transfer the power of choice and decision entirely to themselves, in essence recommitting the first sin. Eve was tempted by Satan to “be like God, knowing good and evil.” She could then choose and arbitrate what was right and wrong. Are not those who resist God as judge doing the same thing, accruing to them the right to decide? How sad it will be when they, like Adam and Eve, try to hide from the overwhelming presence of the one true Lord and Judge of all creation. On the other hand, we, those who bend and bow, proclaiming Christ not only Savior but Lord, sing with heartfelt thanksgiving the words of the hymn Rock of Ages, with which Packer closes this chapter.

Whilst I draw this fleeting breath;
When my eyelids close in death;
When I soar through tracts unknown,
See thee on thy judgment-throne;
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee.

May God give us the grace not to shrink back from his judgment, but in submission and repentance, as saints and his adopted children, to continually seek his forgiveness so that by judging ourselves and repenting from our sin, we would not need to be judged by our Heavenly Father. [1 Corinthians 11:31](#)

Chapter 15: The Wrath of God

Today's theme: Facing the absolute terror, the wrath of God.

When thinking about God, the one thing every unbeliever and believer alike must deal with is God's wrath. This one aspect of God's nature causes many to reject the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Father of Jesus Christ. They cannot or will not reconcile the divine intersection of love and wrath presented in the Bible. To accept it as true is too terrifying to even think about because wrath is primeval and, to most moderns, primitive and unenlightened, but mostly too demanding for them to deal with.

Scriptural background: [Hebrews 10:30-31](#) [30](#) "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

As Christians, we often forget this passage in Hebrews because if God's wrath falls on sin, won't it fall on our sin as well as the sin of unbelievers? Few appear to be willing to examine the point where the sacrifice of Jesus to pay our debt of sin intersects with the Father's judgment on sin and how that affects us as Christians. Ponder for a moment Paul's statement in [Colossian 1:24](#), where he seems to say that we, each in our part, share in the sufferings of Christ, which was the wrath of God on sin. You can find a good discussion of this verse [at this location](#).

[Job 9:33-35](#) "If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot." NIV

Job correctly understood that no one could arbitrate between him and God. Who would intercede, he asks, understanding what Samuel would later ask, "If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" [1 Samuel 2:25a](#) We, however, know the answer; the mystery has been revealed: "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." [Romans 8:34](#)

Quotes for the week

WRATH, n. Anger of a superior quality and degree, appropriate to exalted characters and momentous occasions; as "the wrath of God," "the day of wrath," etc. . . . Ambrose Bierce (journalist, short-story writer). *The Devil's Dictionary*, 1911.

Wrath is not just anger or extreme anger, but "anger of a superior quality," to which I would add wrath is anger perfectly expressed against something/someone.

"There were times when I drove along the Sunset Strip and looked at those buildings or when I watched the fashionable film colony arriving at some première . . . that I fully expected God in his wrath to obliterate the whole shebang." S J Perelman (humorist and writer). "On Hollywood", *Paris Review*, Spring 1964.

Indeed, some use this type of observation to dismiss God and the possibility of his wrath. Many men have shouted at the heavens, daring God to strike them down, and then laughed when nothing happened, confident in never having to pay for what they have done or were about to do. They mistake long suffering for apathy or impotence.

"I suggest that we can never truly understand why it is that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, had to come into this world unless we understand this doctrine of the wrath of God and the judgment of God." D. Martin Lloyd-Jones. "The Wrath of God". Sermon at Westminster Chapel.

That is the crux of the matter, the why and wherefore of the incarnation, and the mystery of the ages. Without judgment and wrath, who needs a savior? With it, only Christ suffices.

Concern: Will we soft-peddle God's wrath and reduce the seriousness of sin and judgment, thereby reducing the uniqueness of Christ's passion?

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The wrath of God and the cross, intimately entwined, and the most serious moment of all time and existence.

"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind, and *were by nature children of wrath*, just as the others." [Ephesians 2:1-3](#)

This is a great passage to demonstrate the essential fallen nature of all humanity. We are not fundamentally good but, by nature, children of (born into) wrath.

1. Looking at this scripture, why isn't God's wrath part of discipleship?

"You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.'" [Hebrews 12:5-6](#)

Sin, which we strive against, causes God, our Father, to rebuke, chasten, and even scourge us. We, who are born again, are all sons. This applies to you women as well, and as sons, we all (men and women) have the eternal Son's right of inheritance and a claim on the Father's mercy and love.

2. How is the scourging of God, to which this verse refers, different from His wrath? Why is this distinction important?

We could spend several lessons deconstructing the fine points of this distinction about how God sees our sin with the same wrath as he sees all sin. Still, through our adoption in Christ and because of his sacrifice, that wrath is transformed into the chastening scourge that instead flails the sin from the flesh (our old man). It is not wrath unto condemnation, a lot of the lost, but correction unto salvation. It is a fundamental part of our ongoing discipleship and adoption as sons of God.

The difference is straightforward intellectually but sometimes hard to see in practice. In the end, we need to hold onto the words of the author of Hebrews and not lose heart. If this weren't a problem, he wouldn't have said it to encourage us. We are left with our trust in the Father that everything that happens, no matter how difficult or senseless it seems to us, is indeed for our good. [Romans 8:28](#)

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To face up to the truth of God's anger and wrath over sin, since without giving this aspect of God's character its proper place, we diminish the significance of the sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God, on the cross.

"Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?" [Amos 3:6](#) The image of a man, his hands raised over his head to ward off the anger of God, while he is beaten down to his knees, is not a pretty picture or one you will find on any stained-glass windows. But it is something we have to come to terms with.

Very few people take note of what God says in the book of Job when Satan returns after destroying Job's children and his wealth. God accepts responsibility for what happened to Job when, at the end of [Job 2:3](#), he says to Satan, "although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause." Though it was by Satan's hand that Job's life was struck down, God accepts full responsibility because, as the almighty God of all creation, he permitted Satan his actions and allowed it to happen. Everyone who has railed against God and said, "You could have stopped this," is correct. He could, and sometimes does, which is why Amos states the obvious and creates a problem for Christians through the ages. Early in my discipleship, the couple who was training me up in the Lord pointed out this passage and told me that I would begin to grow past the milk of the Gospel when I came to terms with the implications of this passage. Until then, I was just a baby, dependent on someone else to deal with the difficult realities of life in this fallen world.

Chapter 15: The Wrath of God

I must admit, facing up to that did take a lot of the fun out of being a Christian (not all, and to be truthful, the joy became deeper and more meaningful), but we all have to grow up sometime, at least if we want to do anything of significance for God. Who wants to come through the fire of testing naked? [1 Corinthians 3:15](#)

1. What is the difference between wrath and anger? Why is this distinction important?

(p. 148-149) Anger is resentful and antagonistic against injury and insult. Sin is an insult to God, and it injures his created order as well as his creatures and resulted in the only time in all eternity when God was injured, as Christ on the cross bearing the pain and suffering of sin (note that this injury was by God's own choice and inflicted by God on Himself—on His own Son).

Wrath is anger acting in punishment, vengeance, or divine retribution for sin. For me, anger is instantiated (made concrete and real) in action, and to go beyond Packer for a moment, I would add, is why anger never justifies our acting out. Wrath (the acting out) belongs to God alone. We can get angry but are never justified or allowed to act on it. Only God acts on his anger through his wrath. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." [Romans 12:19](#) That is something so many in our society will not respect. Saying I will never forgive means, in essence, I want to exact vengeance on that person, which is not our right. It is God's alone. This stands apart from civil law and judgment, as Paul explains in [Romans 13:1-7](#).

2. How do you react to the statement that there are more verses in the bible dealing with God's anger, fury, and wrath than expressing his love? Why do you think that happened?

(p. 149) The response will be personal, but most people are surprised to discover that. I think it came about because God knew how easy it was for us to accept his love and how easy it was for us to dismiss his anger, fury, and wrath. In addition, since our eternal destinies are at stake, we will not seek the salvation he offers unless we accept the reality of his wrath. Instead, believing erroneously that his love overrides his justice and holiness, we will expect him to accept us as we are and not turn away from our wickedness.

3. How do you deal with Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 1:7b-9 "...the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power..."

(p. 149-150) The focus here is that God's wrath in the NT, including identifying Jesus Christ's "dealing out retribution" as wrath, is every bit (maybe even more so) severe compared to God's wrath in the OT. There is no discrepancy or inconsistency between who God is at any point in history; there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who biblically is the same yesterday (OT), today (NT), and forever (Church age and beyond). If that last statement is unclear to you, put yourself into the perspective of being a hearer back when it was written. Remember our study of Chapter 7: God Unchanging—that goes for the things we like about God: his loving-kindness, mercy, grace, and compassion, but it also goes for his judgment and wrath. If you claim the full gospel, then claim it all, not picking and choosing the parts you like or are comfortable with. God is who God is, not who you want him to be.

4. What two biblical considerations rescue God from the false accusations of cruelty or meanness when considering his wrath?

(p. 150-152) Sadly, Packer has to try to rescue God from those who deem this aspect of God's character unworthy of him. Maybe that is why some heretics deny a personal God since we don't think of gravity as cruel—it just is; in the same way, if God is not personal, then it is easier to deal with all of the pain and suffering we wish God would take away.

The problem begins when we define God using anthropomorphic language, as Scripture often does. We forget that God is not like us. "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent." [Numbers 23:19a](#)

With that in mind, two things must be considered about God's wrath:

1. **It is judicial**—God's wrath is justice, properly directed. It is righteous and righteously administered. [Romans 2:5-6](#) Despite all sin separating us from God, there is proportionality to the punishment for sin.

"And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I tell you that he will make him ruler over all he has. But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master's will and did not prepare himself or do according to his will shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." [Luke 12:42-48](#)

Three levels of punishment are detailed here, in proportion to what each deserves. That is justice.

2. **We choose it**—We choose sin and rebellion. Some say they only want to be free, but freedom without the necessary restraints that define the proper boundaries is not freedom; it's a self-indulgent mess. You may want to be free of your bones, but what would you be without their constraints?

God is too limiting and unfairly so. Why can't I <insert pet sin here>? I guess this is where we have to come to terms with the nature of limits and the fact that creation is defined by agape, the personal self-sacrificial love of God, not by selfishness and taking what is not ours. We don't have to seize or grab, but we choose to and, in the doing, bear the consequence.

But then God offers forgiveness, yet we do not want to repent and stop. We want to continue; we want what we want, but don't expect to deal with the consequences. It's our choice, and I guess you could say we choose to be spoiled brats, so in the end, God gives us what we choose, consequences included. We get what we ask for!

5. Explain how God's wrath has meaning to you personally and your life as a Christian.

This is personal, but for me, it means I will be held accountable, not just by the laws of nature, e.g., gravity (falling) and momentum (car accidents), but by the moral law of God. I will not get away with anything, nada, and I try to act accordingly.

Several of the most frightening statements in the Bible begin with something like "God gave them over..." Who then is left to save? That is the essence of [Hebrews 6: 4-6](#): "For it is impossible... to renew them again to repentance..."

6. What three things does the book of Romans tell us about God's wrath?

(p. 154-156) ***This new question replaces the former: "How is God's wrath made known?"*** Romans tells us the meaning and revelation of and how to be delivered from God's wrath.

- **Meaning**—Just punishment for sin demonstrates God's proper execution of justice and his hatred of evil.
- **Revelation**—It is constantly disclosed, imprinted on our consciences, confirmed by the Word, and demonstrated here and now. The tokens of God's wrath are there for anyone who wants to see them.
- **Deliverance**—Saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, [Romans 5:9](#), and as a result, there is no condemnation for those in Christ. [Romans 8:1](#) But, returning to question 4:2 above, what will we choose?

This new question replaces the first half of the former: "How are we delivered from God's wrath?"

Chapter 15: The Wrath of God

7. What is the solemn reality of God's wrath? Does this truth change your view of the cross? If so, how?

(p. 156-157) God's wrath is real, and we have to face the truth, no matter how difficult that is. But in doing so, we can glory on the other side of this truth. That is, we can rejoice in the salvation of Christ and maybe, for the first time, truly appreciate how God detests sin and the magnitude of what Christ did for us on the Cross.

The hard part is dealing with the fear, true and deep fear in our souls for the God with whom we have to do, "For our God is a consuming fire." [Hebrews 12:29](#)

So, you started this study with the goal and desire to know God and be known by him. It will get a lot harder before it gets easier, but as I said before, God is who God is, not who you want him to be.

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Sixteen: *The Goodness and Severity of God*. We must see the balance in God's dealings with mankind and His utter graciousness to those whom he calls His children.

The next chapter, while delving deeper into these aspects of God's character, does help us balance the difficult with the joyful. There are only two more really difficult chapters to go.

Goal: To never lose our proper "fear" of God

Think of Aslan, C.S. Lewis's personification of Jesus Christ in his Narnia series. "Is he safe?" Lucy asks. "Safe? Of course not, he's a lion!" is the reply. Hold onto that this week while remembering that He is our Father, who loves us with everlasting love.

I like to say, "A safe God is not God." Safe means controllable, not reliable. God is reliable, but he is never controllable. God is everything good. Remember, evil is nothing in itself; it is always the perversion or negation of something good. So, God's wrath is holy, blameless, and good.

Meditation on Chapter 15: The Wrath of God

If you thought last week's lesson on *God the Judge* was hardcore, well, this week takes us a giant step further when we must deal with the unpalatable subject of wrath and the God who has it, not only as part of his active vocabulary but part of his essential nature.

Packer uses the combined definition of three words: wrath, anger, and indignation to explain the biblical context of God's wrath. This is necessary because the definition of wrath as "deep, intense anger and indignation" requires it. Therefore, he defines anger as the "stirring of resentful displeasure and strong antagonism, by a sense of injury or insult." He stirs indignation into the mix as "righteous anger roused by injustice and baseness." So, to pull that together, we can say that God can have a righteously deep and intense displeasure at what he also has a righteously strong antagonism to, which are fundamental injustices and base behaviors. In other words, SIN.

That offends most of the post-Christian, post-modern Western world. It appears violent, and even the post-modern Christian rejects it outright. As I noted in last week's post, John Shelby Spong, a retired post-modern pseudo-bishop of the Episcopal Church, in his book, *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love*, continues down his long-traveled road of spiritual denial, in this case of the possibility that God can even experience wrath. Interestingly, his "God" can only "love," especially when he denies personhood to Him. How does an impersonal ground of being demonstrate "love"? Don't ask Spong about his non sequitur, oxymoronic arguments. I had the unfortunate opportunity to listen to this man's obfuscating convolutions for an entire evening. He speaks theological word salad but in a way that always sounds reasonable despite not having any real substance. He is not unique and, thankfully, is passing from the scene of influence one day shortly to meet up with the personal God he denies and the wrath he dismisses.

However, if we intend to be Christian, we have to deal with the unpleasant (to us) fact that God gets angry; God gets indignant; God executes wrath on those disserving of it. Yes, He does. Just ask your heart of hearts; it knows.

One thing is sure: everybody dies. What most people don't realize is we die as a direct result of God's wrath toward sin. A disturbing number of people are going to burn in hell. Sorry, but that's an unalterable biblical fact, and it directly results from God's wrath toward sin. We may not like it; we may rail against it, but that is the way it is, and nothing we do or say will change one jot or tittle about it.

When I was a relatively new Christian, I was being disciplined by a married couple who had come out of the Dutch Reformed Tradition. I liked them because they never shrank back from the hard questions. Early in my discipleship journey, they sang in the choir with me at our charismatic, evangelical Episcopal Church. One night, while giving them a ride home after choir practice, we began discussing the bumps ahead for me in my Christian life. The wife, Sheila, said, "Bill, one day you will have to face up to the wrath of God, and how you deal with that will determine the depth of your future walk in Christ." It was an uncomfortable moment, but how true were her words. I have since stubbed my toe many times on God's judgment, wrath, and Fatherly correction. But as Sheila warned me, advising me to read Job and Lamentations carefully, it was my problem, not God's. It is hard to learn, but it is so true and significant to advancing my Christian maturity.

As a study group, you should know that in all the times I have gone through this book, this chapter has been the most difficult for those I have been shepherding along its byways. That's because this topic is so alien to most Christians. Even those who tacitly accept that God has wrath as part of his repertoire don't want to dwell on the subject for more than a few minutes; they immediately want to move on to something "uplifting." For them, it is like the Victorian bathroom: better to keep the door closed except when necessary, and then to get in and out as quickly as possible, and never, no, never talk about it in public.

Well, Packer forces us to deal with it for nine pages and through many arguments. He could have gone on longer but was merciful, understanding our deep aversion to the required medicine. He closes the chapter with a quote from a Reformed favorite, A. W. Pink, in which he earnestly enjoins us to meditate on the solemn reality of God's wrath.

I won't belabor the point this week, seeing the difficulty of the subject matter. Still, I will say that one of the reasons that the observance of Lent has meant so much to me over the years is how it makes the starkness of Holy Week so real and then the joy of Easter into an overwhelming joy. It is the contrast, you see. In the same way, to understand the real hard wood of the cross, you have to understand divine wrath, and when you do that, divine love will never sink into the disgusting parody put forth by idiots like Spong. Instead, by properly appreciating the wrath of God, we can at last understand the motivation behind Paul's words in [Philippians 1:9-11](#), taken from the Amplified Bible.

And this I pray: that your love may abound yet more and more and extend to its fullest development in knowledge and all keen insight [that your love may display itself in greater depth of acquaintance and more comprehensive discernment], so that you may surely learn to sense what is vital, and approve and prize what is excellent and of real value [*recognizing the highest and the best and distinguishing the moral differences*], and that you may be untainted and pure and unerring and blameless [so that with hearts sincere and certain and unsullied, you may approach] the day of Christ [not stumbling nor causing others to stumble]. May you abound in and be filled with the fruits of righteousness (of right standing with God and right doing) which come through Jesus Christ (the Anointed One), to the honor and praise of God [that His glory may be both manifested and recognized].

Yes, love with comprehensive discernment will see all of God and understand real righteousness and its fruit.

My prayer for you this week is that you will never have to experience God's wrath. Instead, since you are surely one of his beloved children, albeit corrected and disciplined, you will be able to understand it at least and, with his help, forever flee from it. Grace and peace be with you now and forever.

Chapter 16: The Goodness and Severity of God

Today's theme: God always pitches to both sides of the plate

Like a successful baseball pitcher, God is unafraid to pitch high and inside, brushing us back when necessary. Everything about God is balanced, and he expresses the fullness of his nature when dealing with creation and his children.

Scriptural background: [Job 2:10](#) "He replied, '...Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?' In all this, Job did not sin in what he said."

That is the soft NIV version. Try the others: adversity (NAS, NJKJ), evil (ESV, Wycliffe, Young's Literal), misfortune, and bad (Amplified). We now come to the where, as the old preacher J. Vernon McGee used to say, "the rubber meets the road."

I want to add an additional thought. In [Hebrews 6:1-12](#) the author tells us to leave behind the elementary, the milk of the Word, and go on to the meat, to the perfection/maturity of the Gospel. I would argue that we have arrived at the real meat of our study, the hard-chewing part that will test our resolve, but if we persevere, we will "through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Quotes for the week

"Yet neither have I forgotten, nor will I pass over the severity of Thy scourge and the wonderful swiftness of Thy mercy." Saint Augustine (354–430). "The Confessions of St. Augustine. The Ninth Book," *The Harvard Classics*. 1909–14

Within the severity, sometimes we forget the goodness, yet it always arrives, washed in the blood of mercy, just not when we may want it, but rather at God's impeccable timing.

"If I were to say, "God, why me?" about the bad things, then I should have said, "God, why me?" about the good things that happened in my life." Arthur Ashe (1943 - 1993). US tennis player, AIDS spokesperson. *The Ultimate Success Quotations Library*, 1997.

He was a good Christian man who died from Aids through no fault of his own (blood transfusion), yet to the end, did not blame God.

"Never forget that [God] tests his real friends more severely than the lukewarm ones." Kathryn Hulme (1900 - 1981). US writer. "The Nun's Story," Little, Brown, 1956.

We all know what happens to the lukewarm. Training and testing are never easy, and they are not without understanding what any successful athlete learns: "No pain, no gain."

"God promises a safe landing but not a calm passage." Bulgarian Proverb

This is an important lesson to those who claim the Christian life should be victorious mountain-top experiences and see all problems as a lack of faith. Peter's passage across the water was far from calm, but he landed in the sure arms of his Lord and Savior.

Concern: That we will lose our sense of balance when considering how God interacts with us in living out our Christian lives

"Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God: on those that fell, severity; but toward you goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off." *Romans 11:22*

Packer uses this passage for the title of this chapter. It is a sure antidote to an unbalanced view of God and the Christian life.

1. Looking at this scripture, what is the only way to escape God's severity?

"And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening

of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." [Hebrews 12:5b-6](#)

One could argue that you could run away, abandon your faith, and God would leave you alone until judgment, but that is like jumping from the frying pan into the fire; there is no relief there. In essence, once God chooses you, *there is no escape*, so gird up your loins (cowboy up, be "can do," be prepared) and get on with it.

2. This scripture makes it appear that we cannot escape what we commonly call the severity of God. How does this scripture relate to the scripture from Romans above?

The severity to those who fell in punishment without hope, while the goodness towards us always includes painful correction mediated with love, mercy, and compassion. They may appear the same from the outside, but they are radically different in purpose and result. Job shows us the absolute difference.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: To embrace the whole of God's character and not to minimize His severity while relishing His goodness.

A noble but difficult goal that we will spend the rest of our lives striving toward.

The Book of Job gives us a sobering premise that we should accept everything from the hand of God. As the creator, he can do as he sees fit with us. That grates against our sense of pride and self-worth, our human sense of fairness and self-significance. But God told Moses that he made the blind or the seeing, the deaf or those who hear. [Exodus 4:11](#) We rail at God, asking, "Why?" God says, "Because I am God, and you need to know no more." Whether or not we can accept that goes to the heart of our hearts and eventually to the success or failure of our efforts as Christians.

Let it be clear: there is nowhere else to go, no other possible savior. [Hosea 13:4](#)

1. What fundamental truth does this chapter express about the character of God?

(p. 158-159) With God, we must always remember the "and"; there is judgment and mercy, goodness and severity, wrath and compassion, and infinite and personal God *and* man (Jesus Christ).

2. What four mistakes does Packer say most people make in understanding this facet of God's nature? Did any of these shoes formerly fit your feet? If so, which one(s)? How and why have you changed?

(p. 159-161) The four mistakes are:

1. **Private religious hunches**—This is always a danger, and it is why I try so very hard to remain grounded in the Word and it alone, or as the reformers would say, "sola scriptura"—scripture alone, which I slight alter to be "in the end, scripture" or there would be no reason to use this book. I prefer a Berean backstop. [Acts 17:11](#)
2. **Trap of spiritual equivalence**—We must be careful not to let cultural influence or other religions define our understanding of God. While "all truth is God's truth," we must test everything against the Word. [Acts 17:11](#)
3. **Our sin is not real to us or not as serious as it is**—This is the root of charging God with being unfair or too harsh, or something not worthy of being God. God's mercy becomes fully evident when we see our sin for what it is.
4. **One-sided, only "loving" or self-defined "good" God**—This imbalance, the celestial Santa Claus view of God, will taint everything we do and distort our understanding of Him and ourselves unless corrected and both sides of God's nature embraced.

I would say that I suffered from all four initially, and God has corrected me out of them all. However, they constantly try to slip back into my understanding, hidden in the many disguises worn by my culture and even my church (think generic and plural, as in all churches). The old man, as Paul lamented, is always close at hand, tempting this way and that, trying to steer us into the ditch on either side of the narrow road. For

Chapter 16: The Goodness and Severity of God

those who are not liturgical, I treasure Lent, the lead-up to Easter in which I am forced to deal with sin, judgment, and, in the end, God's wrath visited on his Son. Without that, the empty tomb is merely a miracle of resurrection and not the nexus of all human history, and the fullness of suffering (propitiation and the consuming of God's wrath—"I thirst") turned to the fullness of grace (atonement and salvation).

3. What happens when these mistaken views of God are forced to confront real evil? If this has happened to you, how did you come to terms with it?

(p. 160) They have to diminish God in some way, or he becomes a monster they cannot deal with. Their God means well, but he is impotent and cannot control it all, leaving us, in the end, a victim of fate. A classic example is the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Rabbi Harold Kushner, which proposes a God who loves us but is only in partial control of the world he created. It's not his fault or yours...excrement happens.

I don't think we ever get fully past the problem and are tested repeatedly. God never changes and is never less in control; we must remember that Job NEVER learned the reason for his suffering; only we, the reader, did. In the end, we, like Job, must say, "Well, shut my mouth; you are God, and I am not." That is so hard, especially for us moderns, to do.

4. Packer considers [Psalm 18](#) significant for understanding God's goodness and perfection. Read and meditate on the Psalm and note what it brings to mind.

(p. 161-162) This will be entirely personal. However, many will stumble over the requirements expressed (righteousness, clean hands, humbleness, mercifulness, purity, etc.) but need to remember that it is in the forgiveness of Christ, covered by his blood, that we can say this psalm with David with a hopeful heart.

5. What is the problem that [Romans 11:20-22](#) brings to light? (*"But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. If God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness [severity] of God: sternness [severity] to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off."*) How is this problem nurtured by some of our views of God's goodness and severity?

(p. 163-164) Goodness scorned (misused, taken advantage of) brings on severity. Do you think you are immune? God's goodness and kindness are meant to lead us to repentance. We tread the precipice; we could be "cut off." Instead of using the respite of God's goodness and mercy to run to his forgiveness and deal with our sins, we seek false security in a God who is only mercy, and we fail to address the seriousness of the problem. We should be afraid; we should be very afraid, remembering that fear is the beginning of wisdom that strips the false from the real and exposes God for who he is.

6. What key factor (expressed with many similar words) tempers the severity of God?

(p. 164-165)

God is patient, slow to anger, longsuffering, compassionate, kind, tolerant, loving, and not willing any should perish, but all should come to repentance (if only...).

7. What three lessons can we learn from God's long-suffering?

(p. 165-166) We should learn to appreciate:

1. **Goodness of God**—"Count your blessings," Packer says, and in the end, say with the psalmist, "I will fulfill my vows to the Lord." [Psalm 116:18](#)
2. **Patience of God**—Marvel at it, learn from it, and imitate it in your dealings with others.
3. **Discipline of God**—It is in him that we live and move and have our being. [Acts 17:28](#) Everything he does is for our good, to save us from the "somnolence of complacency." His discipline is loving correction only, the barest minimum we need, and never more than we can bear, no matter how we whine about it.

8. Look at the last sentence in this chapter. What important truth does that scripture reveal about God's severity?

It argues that learning comes through affliction. It is an axiom that we learn very little from our successes, but there is always something important to learn from failure if we let it teach us. God's severity is his compassionate attempt to teach us what we need to know (because the more success we have, the less we seem to listen) to become what he has created us to be. Change is hard work in every context, but none more so than in our spiritual life.

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Seventeen: *The Jealous God*. Jealousy has an extremely bad rap, but Packer raises the question, based on specific scripture statements, whether there are legitimate forms of jealousy. Approach this chapter with an open mind, and you will be surprised by what you learn.

The pure dictionary definition of jealousy is extremely negative, encompassing envy, apprehension, or bitterness. God is none of these, and while those feelings can drive jealousy, they are its misuse. As you read this chapter, remember how we need to approach these types of learning experiences: God defines the word, not the word defines God. As God describes by his being and actions, love is properly expressed, so he defines jealousy as properly expressed. Both can be sinfully twisted, but "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent," so when God is jealous, it is the holy expression of his demand for righteousness and not sinful, and there is no need for repentance. [Numbers 23:19](#)

Goal: Maintain a balanced perspective on God's dealings with us as we mature in our Christian walk.

Remember Job's words, "He replied, '...Shall we accept good from God and not trouble/evil?' In all this, Job did not sin in what he said." Maintain your equilibrium when responding to the vicissitudes of life. [Job 2:10](#) Our strength is the same strength that Paul drew on in [Philippians 4:11b-13](#) "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

All too often, when faced with a problem understanding something about God, we fail to call upon Christ to give us the strength, perseverance, and insight we need to learn what we need to know or the Holy Spirit to teach us (see [John 14:6](#), [1 Corinthians 2:13](#), [1 John 2:27](#))

Meditation on Chapter 16: The Goodness and Severity of God

In the years I have been shepherding people through this book, I probably have lost close to half of them by the time we get to this chapter. There has only been one exception: a group of young adults in my YADM (Young Adult Discipleship Ministry) class. We didn't lose anyone and picked up a couple along the way. God did something very special during that year with those young adults.

While the subject of this book is daunting in itself, most people begin their real struggling at about chapter nine, *God Only Wise*, recover a little with the chapters on love and grace, but then hit the pavement on the last four chapters of this section. However, this is usually the last straw for those who struggled along, feeling beaten and bruised by the *Wrath of God*. So, if you are still with us, I praise God and ask with heartfelt earnestness for his love and grace to continue to sustain you.

Nobody, even atheists, has a problem with the goodness of God. For most people, the definition of God encompasses two words: love and goodness. It is, however, very wrong. It is not incorrect to say that God loves and that he is, by his very nature, good; he is. The problem is that those who only accept those two aspects of God's infinitely expansive nature cannot couple his loving goodness with his judgment, wrath, and absolute severity.

Chapter 16: The Goodness and Severity of God

Packer chooses the opening words of this chapter from Paul's first half of [Romans 11:22](#), so eloquently expressed in the original King James.

Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God. (KJV)

Later translations sometimes express it a little less starkly.

Consider, therefore, the kindness and sternness of God (NIV)

Now you see both how kind and how hard God can be. (CEV)

We see how kind God is. It shows how hard He is also. (NLV)

See how kind God is. And see how hard he is. (WE)

Using the words sternness and hard is less intimidating than the blunt word severity. Though Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of The Message has serious problems in some areas, I like how he expresses this context.

If God didn't think twice about taking pruning shears to the natural branches, why would he hesitate over you? He wouldn't give it a second thought. Make sure you stay alert to these qualities of gentle kindness and ruthless severity that exist side by side in God—ruthless with the deadwood, gentle with the grafted shoot. But don't presume on this gentleness. The moment you become deadwood, you're out of there. [Romans 11:21-22](#)

Eugene pulls no punches with “ruthless severity.” I especially like “that exist side by side in God.” Side by side captures the truth of the passage and Packer’s argument in this chapter. They are both essential parts of God’s nature; he expresses them fully and completely with righteous holiness.

While this is another short chapter, only eight pages, Packer successfully welds these two aspects of God’s nature together. He argues that to understand the utter goodness of God, you have to accept his severity or use Peterson, his ruthless severity. On balance, you can also say that if you want to argue for God’s severity against sinners, then you also have to accept his goodness toward the redeemed, for the second half of [Romans 11:22](#) says:

...on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

Dr. Packer decries the modern muddle-headedness of floundering fellows who cling to a hodgepodge of fancies about God. How’s that for a mouthful? He feels these lost and confused souls are mired in pride, pushing their relativistic equivalence of God and explicitly denying the severity of sin. Hmmm, it sounds a lot like a definition of my previous example, the wrongly Reverend Bishop John Shelby Spong.

Ultimately, we need to ask ourselves, “What has God promised us?” There is a Bulgarian proverb that says, “God promises a safe landing but not a calm passage.” I think the unknown author of that adage had Paul’s Mediterranean Sea journey to Rome in mind. Even though it was filled with storms and a shipwreck, it resulted in a safe passage for all hands.

From a bit closer to home, tennis great Arthur Ashe, a sort of Tiger Woods of my young adulthood, said,

If I were to say, “God, why me?” about the bad things, I should have said, “God, why me?” about the good things that happened in my life.

Arthur said this in response to questions about the certainty of his faith during his AIDS struggle, gotten from a blood transfusion, which eventually took his life. This soft-spoken, elegant man mirrored the words of [Job 2:10](#),

Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?

My chief goal for all who study this book has been to assist them in maintaining their sense of balance in understanding God and living out their Christian lives. Our aim should not be to minimize God’s severity while relishing his goodness. The Book of Job gives us a sobering premise: that we should accept *everything* from the hand of God. To be blunt, as our creator, God has the right to do with us as he sees fit. I can almost hear the gears of resistance grating against the sense of pride and self-worth, and the whole thing seems unfair and flies in the face of our sense of self-significance (But God, don’t I matter?). Remember, however, what God told Moses. He made the blind or the seeing, the deaf or those who hear. [Exodus 4:11](#) Hearing that, we all, at one

Meditation on Chapter 16: The Goodness and Severity of God

time or another, shout at God, “Why?” God’s only reply (re: Job) is, “Because I am God, and you need to know no more.” Asking is not a sin (Job did not sin; only his friends sinned). The key is whether or not we can, like Job, accept what God has done even without an answer (or even with an unfair answer). Our response goes to the heart of our heart and eventually to the success or failure of our effort to grow as Christians and understand the God with whom we have to do.

Underneath all of this is the foundation of trust, the rock, and essence of saving faith; either God can be trusted, or he cannot. Satan told Eve and every human since then that God cannot be trusted. It is the first and root temptation we all face. The essence of being Christian, being a child of God, is believing in your heart of hearts that God can be trusted, even, as Job said:

Though He slays me, yet will I trust Him...He also shall be my salvation, for a hypocrite could not come before Him. [Job 13:15-16](#)

I hope that we will never be hypocrites, and as you ponder these truths about His Holy Spirit, you will find that it will give you the grace to maintain your equilibrium through the vicissitudes of life. As Christians, our strength is the same strength that Paul drew on in [Philippians 4:11b-13](#)

I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can do everything through him, who gives me strength.

May God bless you and keep you, may his grace and goodness always shine upon you, and if you must taste of his severity may the time of its testing be short with his mercies arriving on swift feet to comfort you.

Chapter 17: The Jealous God

Today's theme: God, The Jealous Lover

As I pointed out in the **What to Do Next?** section for the last lesson, the pure dictionary definition of jealousy is extremely negative, encompassing envy, apprehension, or bitterness. Remember, God is none of these, and while those feelings can drive jealousy in us, they are misused and sinful expressions. As we work through this study today, remember how we need to approach these learning experiences: God defines the word; the word does not define God. As God describes by his being and actions, love is properly expressed, so he also defines jealousy as properly expressed. Both can be sinfully twisted, and we do that all the time, but "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent," so when God is jealous, it is the holy expression of jealousy, not sinful and there is no need of repentance. [Numbers 23:19](#) Stop trying to drag God down and be lifted instead.

Scriptural background: [Exodus 20:5](#) "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God..." [34:14](#) "Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, *whose name is Jealous*, is a jealous God."

I bet you have never seen that verse before, or if you have, you failed to notice that *God names himself "Jealous."* That raises the stakes considerably.

Quotes for the week

"God enters by a private door into every individual." Ralph Waldo Emerson

Emerson's insight speaks to the jealousy of God. God is our ultimate lover who loves us with everlasting love and has private access to us, just as my wife has private access. Think about it.

"The idea that we are physical beings descended from primeval cells in nutrient soups, that idea does violence to my intuition, stomps all over it with football shoes. The idea that we are descended from a jealous god who formed us out of dust to choose between kneel-and-praying or fires-of-damnation, that stomps me worse." Richard Bach, American author.

This goes to the nexus point of our existence. Kneel, bend your knee, submit; these things stomp our pride and self-importance and go to the root of all sin, which so many cannot accept. [Richard Bach](#) wrote [Jonathan Livingston Seagull](#), claiming the book came to him as "a visionesque spooky thing..."

"But the true God hath this attribute, that he is a jealous God; and therefore his worship and religion will endure no mixture nor partner." Francis Bacon. *Of Unity in Religion, Essays, Civil and Moral*. The Harvard Classics, 1909–14.

His worship and religion have many partners these days, but we must remember that Bacon spoke of the "true God," not the God we want him to be, the anthropomorphic god of so much modern in-name-only Christianity.

Concern: That we misinterpret God's jealousy into something we can then self-righteously reject.

Jealousy (in the biblical sense) is essentially a passionate commitment to someone for their well-being. It can be morally good or bad, depending on the motive behind the zeal and its context. We should note that God is not jealous *of*, as we so often are, but jealous *for*. There is a significant difference. We often fail to appreciate the intensity of the yearning of God's heart *for* us, something the OT prophets understood very well.

It is on the significant difference between *for* and *of* that the true understanding of this whole attribute of God turns.

1. Can you think of a time when you were righteously jealous? How did that appear different to you than common jealousy?

This answer will be personal, but each example should pass the test of holy, pure jealousy for the person for their good.

I think any Christian husband or wife who is jealous of their spouse and desires them not to be tempted into breaking their marriage bond is reacting against the tempter and not acting out of fear for their loss but for their beloved's sake. They do not want them to sin for what it will do to them and are properly and biblically jealous.

Remember, God does not need us, so his jealousy for us is always *for us*, for our best, for what we will lose, and for the pain we will suffer if we sin. His anger against the tempter (man or satanic agent) is for what they are doing to us, not to him. We are the opposite and are jealous of what it does to us and of the one who now has what we want or deserve. On the other hand, God's jealousy is part of his compassion for his children.

Interacting With the Text

Goal: See God's jealousy as an active component of His everlasting love for us.

It is very important to grasp that God's jealousy for us cannot be separated from his love for us—note I said love *for us*, not *of us*. We must continually remind ourselves that God's love is not because of who we are; there is nothing in us worth loving until the Father redeems us by the blood of the Son applied to us by the saving work of the Holy Spirit. Remember David's cry: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin, my mother conceived me. [Psalm 51:5](#) God gives us worth by his love/agape—*love for us*, not sees in us worth which is love/eros, *love of us*. Most of our love is love/eros, the jealous desire to possess what enthralls us.

1. Is it hard for you to accept jealousy as part of God? What about in the believer? What about jealousy causes you problems, if any?

(p.167-168) I will state with high confidence that everyone has some difficulty dealing with divine jealousy. That doesn't mean we cannot come to terms with it and understand it; that is the purpose of this chapter and part of this study, but to this day, this is the one part of the book and God's nature that still gives me pause. This is intimately related to God's goodness, severity, and wrath. It is his jealousy for his creation, specifically us (the rest of creation was for us), that moves him to execute his judgment, severity, and wrath.

As to other believers who claim (maybe rightly so) to be jealous for God, I am generally distrustful of their motives, at least as they are worked out in practice. This is one part of our nature that is so easily corrupted, even when it starts with the purest/holiest of motives. It quickly deteriorates into ugly sin and has justified much cruelty on the part of the Church and Christians.

Righteous, holy Jealousy is only possible, I believe, on a personal level, and even then, only for a short duration with similar limits to anger—*Do not let the sun go down on your anger.* [Ephesians 4:25](#). Whenever jealousy is institutionalized, like in the Crusades, its initial piety always turns destructive and sinful.

2. What two facts does Packer argue affect our perception of the nature of divine jealousy? State them in your own words.

(p. 167-170) Packer wants us to keep two facts in mind:

1. **Biblical anthropomorphisms**—When we attempt to describe God, we use human language tied to how it is used in our lives. God does not have body parts (He is Spirit) or emotions in the same way we do. But since he is personal and we are created in his image, God often talks to us in language and imagery we can understand, anthropomorphic imagery. However, we must be careful to remember God is God; he is self-defining. He defines the proper existence of the attributes and emotions he anthropomorphically expresses in his Word. Our human understanding of those words does not define him. As the Packers say, that is getting "hold of the wrong end of the stick."

Chapter 17: The Jealous God

2. **Two types of human jealousy**—One is infantile and covetous, filled with envy, malice, and meanness. The other, the zealous desire to protect a love relationship, can be pure or at least start out that way (see my response to the previous question about how this can easily deteriorate).
3. Why is jealousy protecting the bond of marriage a holy jealousy? In what ways can this holiness be perverted?

(P. 170-171) It is holy because it responds to the God-given exclusivity of the sexual and emotional nature of the marriage relationship, which is the essence of biblical marriage, mirroring the exclusiveness of our relationship with God. Packer uses Professor Randolph Tasker's [The Epistle of James](#) to argue that any spouse who isn't jealous for their marriage exclusivity lacks the necessary fruit of marital affection.

[Proverbs 6:31-35](#) assumes that the violation of the marriage bed correctly causes a jealous fury that cannot be appeased. A thief can be forgiven unless he steals a man's wife. But, with the Lord's prayer in mind, we cannot be forgiven for that which we will not forgive, and whenever the initial holy outrage turns to bitter unforgiveness and revenge, it has gone very wrong and been fully perverted.

4. Why is God's jealousy couched in the terms of the marriage bond?

(p 172) God's jealousy is tied to his covenantal love, which, like marriage, is exclusive and for life. God's covenantal love and the love of the marriage bond are fundamental to God's plan for creation. Eve was not an afterthought but a learning experience for Adam that he was not made to be alone. Adam was made for God and Eve together—yes, Eve was made for him, but her creation presupposes their mutual desire for/submission to each other as necessary and part of God-designed human fulfillment. [Genesis 2:18, 25](#) and [Ephesians 5:21, 31](#). This exclusivity is fundamental to both relationships.

5. According to Packer, what two things does God's jealousy require of us as Christians?

(p. 102-175) God jealously demands that we:

1. **Be zealous for God**—Our concern for God should be as great as his concern for us. Devotion to God, expressed as zeal for him, demonstrates the reality of our faith as we follow in the footsteps of Christ, about whom it was said, "Zeal for your house has eaten me up." [John 2:17](#), [Psalm 69:9](#), Remembering also, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." [John 4:34](#) We must honestly ask ourselves what our true spiritual food is.
2. **We are threatened when we are not zealous for God**—Scripture is clear and calls churches (and I would argue individuals) to "...be zealous and repent [Revelation 3:19](#) because God will chasten us, individually and corporately.

What to Do Next

Review Section Two and read over your responses in each chapter's lesson. Notice how Packer built his arguments as he progressed through the attributes of God, with each adding something substantive to the emerging picture.

This should enable you to connect everything you have learned and see how interrelated everything is. You cannot dismiss one aspect of God without distorting the entire picture. The Full Gospel is the fullness of God, entirely accepted and kept in balance.

Goal: Remember that God is balanced in His approach to us and our growth as His children."

Jealousy is dangerous because it can be easily perverted into something extremely ugly and treacherous. That said, we must learn to properly apply this emotion in the contexts that demand its expression. Always remember that righteous jealousy is jealousy for not being jealous.

Be jealous for your relationship with God and let go of whatever tries to rob that exclusiveness from you.

Meditation on Chapter 17: The Jealous God

This week, in closing Section Two of our study, we will venture into an area that most Christians consider outright sinful and find the possibility of ascribing to God such feelings downright unchristian, if not blasphemous. The subject is jealousy, and today, we examine the *Jealous God*.

[Richard Bach](#), the famed author of [Jonathan Livingston Seagull](#), said it for most people:

The idea that we are physical beings descended from primeval cells in nutrient soups, that idea does violence to my intuition, which stomps all over it with football shoes. The idea that we are descended from a jealous god who formed us out of dust to choose between kneel-and-praying or fires-of-damnation, that stomps me worse.

Bach rebelled against both of those choices. He fits in well with most Christians. They rightly rebel against being considered children of an evolutionary accident while at the same time having a serious problem seeing themselves as the created beings of a jealous God.

In this short chapter (to the relief of many readers, he keeps the unpalatable discussions brief), Dr. Packer deals head-on with the idea that any of this jealousy stuff is the imagination of the biblical writers. He says outright, “Nobody would imagine a jealous God.” While I understand where he is coming from, I have to respectfully disagree since the Greeks were adept at imagining gods who were jealous and petty. I think he forgot to include the qualifier “Christian” so that nobody would imagine a jealous Christian God.

That said, Dr. Packer centers the understanding of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as jealously recorded within the sacred scriptures and not in someone’s fevered imaginings. In the end, the sum and substance of our historic Christian faith is in the written record, where we find God declaring himself as jealous. In the second commandment given to Moses and inscribed by His own finger, God says:

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God *am a jealous God*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” [Exodus 20:5](#)

I think any reasonable and objective person should be able to understand how God would be jealous of his people turning away from him and going after any false god. They should be able to see it as a fundamental perversion of their relationship with him. But given that context, God goes a step further. He tells Moses and the people,

Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, *whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God*), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. [Exodus 34:12-16](#)

Whose name is Jealous...think about that. This is the great I AM, who just a moment earlier had said,

The LORD, the LORD, a God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin... [Exodus 34:6-7](#)

Oh yes, we love that statement while shrinking back from the others. Just so you can’t argue that this is all Old Testament overstatement or hyperbole, Paul asks this fundamental question of the Corinthians.

Shall we provoke the Lord to *jealousy*? Are we stronger than he? [1 Corinthians 10:22](#)

Paul’s question/warning is given in the similar context of idolatry that we saw in Exodus so that one thing appears obvious in both the Old and New Testaments: God is decidedly jealous of those whom he calls his own when it comes to any form of idolatry. Packer further amplifies this context by referring to [James 4:4-5](#) where the author presents God as jealous of our wholehearted love and devotion and is concerned that we do not grieve the Holy Spirit that resides within us.

Chapter 17: The Jealous God

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns *jealously* over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?

Having biblically established that God is a jealous God, Packer then asks the fundamental question: How can what is normally a vicious vice when seen in us be a virtue in God, a matter worthy of praise? He answers this question in two ways.

1. ***Jealousy in God is anthropomorphic.*** God uses the concept of jealousy to help us understand something fundamental about himself. It is not the “frustration, envy, and spite” that we commonly evoke, but in God, it is a “praiseworthy zeal to preserve something supremely precious.”
2. ***Not all human jealousy is wrong.*** We are all familiar with mad obsessiveness, which, being infantile and covetous, should be condemned wherever we see it. But there is also a fervent zeal to protect, to guard that which is fundamental, e.g., a marriage relationship. That is not wrong, but right and true.

From the beginning, God’s relationship with his people has been cast in the image of marriage. Even Jesus Christ calls the Church, his chosen called-out ones, his bride. Throughout the Scriptures, Old and New, God is seen as a husband who brooks no defilement of the marriage bed. This marriage between God and his people is the fundamental covenant, the sealing of his eternal love for his chosen, and as Paul reminds us in [Ephesians 5:27](#), it reflects his ultimate purpose.

...so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

So great is God’s love/agape that he is jealous that his bride be undefiled. Think about it. Isn’t that a reasonable way for God to be?

Packer ends this chapter with this question: do we have a zeal for God? Do we have the same passion to cleanse our own lives that Jesus had when he cleansed the temple? It was said of him, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” [John 2:17](#) Does zeal for our temple (our body), the home of the Spirit of God, consume us? Are we jealous that God should receive us spotless, holy, and without blemish? If not, why not? Do we want to provoke his jealousy?

These are hard questions and tough demands. The ending chapters of this section have been difficult in that they end under the weight of four difficult examinations. It is not a pleasant or easy task to face up to the demands made on pages 138-175, but it is a necessary one, a very necessary one.

In all the years I have been teaching my way through this book, these are the chapters where most people abandon the study as the topic is too much for them to deal with.

Next week, we will review this difficult section and try to put everything in context. Until then, remember to always see God’s jealousy as an active component of his everlasting love for us. Do not forget that jealousy is a treacherous emotion. It is easily perverted into something extremely ugly and dangerous. That said, we still have to learn how to apply this emotion whenever the context demands it properly. Always remember, righteous jealousy is jealous *for* not jealous *of*.

May God bless and keep you, and may He guard your heart and mind, keeping it pure, holy, and blameless, to His honor and glory. Amen.

Meditation on Chapter 17: The Jealous God

Review of Section Two: Behold Your God!

Today's theme: Pondering the significance of what it means to have beheld the Lord our God.

The Section title says it all. Packer spent 11 chapters introducing a foundation of attributes that help his readers meet the God with whom they have to do. Each aspect builds a fuller picture of our Creator/Redeemer God. By the time you arrive at this point, your understanding should be sufficiently broadened to make the final section have real meaning and biblical support.

As a reminder for this review, I would like to remind you of the flip side of your new knowledge. Back in Chapter 2, we examined the difference between the Greek (worldly) view of knowledge and the Hebrew (biblical) view, which requires us to respond to what we know. Jesus' admonition "to whom much is given, much is required" applies here. [Luke 12:48](#) I have long believed this is why more Christians aren't diligent biblical students—they don't have confidence that they can deal with the expectations attached to that knowledge. It is easier to avoid it all.

This is the Catch-22 (a situation in which a person is frustrated by a paradoxical rule or set of circumstances that preclude any attempt to escape from them) of the Christian life and the bane of most discipleship efforts. However, if you have made it this far, you have gotten through the hard part, and the Holy Spirit is already working in your life and leading you through the new understandings you have gained.

I would rather know what is expected of me than say, too late to do anything about it: "If only I had known"—note the paradox in that statement.

Scriptural background: Matthew 5:8 "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*"

I pray that this scripture has taken on new meaning for you because of this study. Pure motives and efforts allow Christians to see God for who he is, not what they may have wished him to be. The converse is true: If you now have a clearer vision of God, it is because your heart has begun its *journey of purification*. The two go hand in hand.

Isaiah 40:9 "*O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!'*"

Those who have seen God for who he is naturally want to share that with their brethren, so to paraphrase this scripture, we could say, "O Christian, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain, O Temple of the Holy Spirit, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid, say to the churches of Christendom, "Behold your God!"

Quotes for the week

"How shall I behold the face, henceforth of God or Angel, earst with joy and rapture so oft beheld? Those heav'nly shapes will dazzle now this earthly, with their blaze insufferably bright." John Milton (1608–1674), British poet. *Paradise Lost* (l. Bk. IX, l. 1080–1098).

Poets choose their words with care, and when Milton calls the dazzling blaze insufferable, it is not an accident but an admission to the problem that truly seeing God is not only unbearable but intolerable. The word carries the problem we have been struggling with throughout this study—the incapability of putting up with the demands that this vision/knowing/seeing demands. To the heart that shrinks back, the dazzling blaze and consuming fire of God is insufferable.

"People see God every day; they just don't recognize Him." Pearl Bailey.

We could spend the whole lesson on this statement and its ramifications. It points back to Milton's insight, showing us that the reason we don't recognize him is that we just can't deal with the demands that recognition would place on our lives.

"Two men please God -- who serves Him with all his heart because he knows Him; who seeks Him with all his

Concern: That we will shrink back from seeing God as He is rather than what we want Him to be

heart because he knows Him not.” Nikita Ivanovich Panin, mentor to Catherine the Great.

We are the second, hoping to become the first, and after going through this book so many times, I can see how far I have come, but at the same time realize how much further I have to go. Panin had to be referring to the Great Commandment when he said this. [Mark 12:13](#)

Concern: That we will shrink back from seeing God as He is rather than what we want Him to be

In the first section of this book, Packer deals with idolatry. One form of that sin is creating invalid mental images of God. We do this when we try to mold God into something that is pleasing to our sensibilities rather than taking Him as He reveals Himself to be. We, in essence, attempt to recreate God in an image we find acceptable.

It is good to remind ourselves that one important aspect of this study is our efforts to break down the idols we have built up to represent the God we desire to have in our lives.

1. When you think of God, what image comes to mind? How does this fit with what you have learned in this section?

This will be a very personal response. The question is reflective and deconstructive—how far have we come in our journey, and how far do we still have to go?

In Review of chapters seven through seventeen

Goal: To know God as he is, not as we want him to be.

Having traveled the discipleship road for over forty-five years, I believe this is the root of discipleship and sanctification. It is the only way we can keep the requirements of the Great Commandment, and it informs everything we do as Christians. God is. He is not who we want Him to be.

1. Why is God’s immutability important? Why do you think Packer started with this attribute of God?

(p. 75ff) God’s unchanging immutability lays the foundation for every other thing about him. Because he is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, whatever we learn of him, whatever he has revealed about himself, it will not change. Most importantly for the believer, whose dealings with God are founded on faith (trust), it makes God the most trustworthy person we know. He is **absolutely dependable**.

“God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” ([Numbers 23:19](#))

“The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.” ([Psalm 33:11](#))

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (YAHWEH) is a God of covenants and agreements, and they are as reliable as his Word and have an unchanging, immutable nature. Remember the six aspects of God’s character (compared to ours) that Packer points out that do not change:

- **Life. God:** from everlasting to everlasting, unchanging, immutable at His core, and reliable in all things. **Us:** from beginning to...I constantly change for good or ill.
- **Character. God:** permanently good. **Us:** always in some way deficient, needing correction, fixing—can be broken, possibly beyond repair.
- **Truth. God:** Always, God does not lie. **Us:** I lie all the time, especially to myself (e.g., rationalizing). I shade the truth and cast things in their best light.
- **Ways. God:** The same always: yesterday, today, and tomorrow. **Us:** I wander constantly. Hopefully, I am improving, but sometimes it seems one step forward—two back, two forward—one back.
- **Purposes. God:** His plan is from eternity, and his purposes do not change. **Us:** I vacillate all over the

Review of Section Two: Behold Your God!

place. It seems to be a joke among modern men, even those approaching retirement, "What am I going to be when I grow up?" We constantly have to fight double-mindedness.

- **Son (Trinitarian nature).** *God:* [Hebrews 13:8](#) tells us about the utter reliability of Jesus the Son. *Us:* As God's adopted son (or daughter), I could be much better than I am. Thank God I am now part of His eternal family.

2. What is the significance of God's majesty when you attempt to behold your Lord?

(p. 82ff) This term Majesty, unused in modern times, goes far beyond greatness and goodness and includes dignity, glory, dominion, and power, which, even with those additions, is not enough to encompass its fullness

[Jude 1:25](#) "To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

In [Job 38-41](#), God uses the illustration of how nature dwarfs mankind and how He dwarfs nature. The comparison was effective in the time of Job, but it works even better today. God now says, could you create the human genome with all its complexities and dependencies and make it work so perfectly, beginning with a handful of dirt? He invites us to look at the Hubble telescope images. He asks if we can create that beautifully complex universe, much less the infinite complexity that makes it all work and hold together. Imagine what kind of God it requires to hold all of that together. Then he moves on to the complexity of our daily lives throughout history and has us remember that it is in him that we live and move and have our being. [Acts 17:28](#)

Our God defines the meaning of majesty, and even then, it only touches the dazzling wonder of His being.

3. We live in an age when education is ubiquitous, and everyone thinks they know or can know everything they need to know. How does the wisdom of God intersect with this notion?

(p.90-108) This question deals with two chapters: nine and ten. Packer begins with the argument that God alone is truly wise. Without God, we have no hope of real wisdom. Only He grants it, and only the humble heart can apprehend it when he does.

That said, wisdom is a tenuous thing to grasp. What is it; where does it come from; when do you have it? In a sense, it is both something that already exists and something we try to apprehend during our lives. A common definition is "the ability to think and act utilizing knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, and insight." Knowledge, understanding, insight, and experience are things we discover. They are not wisdom. Wisdom is using those things rightly, and only God can actually do that.

The Bible argues that wisdom comes from God, not from us (it makes sense if he alone is truly wise). It is either the work of the Spirit (the Spirit of Wisdom) or a gift from God (re: Solomon). Job asks ([Job 28:12-20](#))

But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Man does not know its worth,
and it is not found in the land of the living.
The deep says, 'It is not in me,'
and the sea says, 'It is not with me.'
It cannot be bought for gold,
and silver cannot be weighed as its price.
It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx or sapphire.
Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.
No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;
the price of wisdom is above pearls.
The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
nor can it be valued in pure gold.

From where, then, does wisdom come?
And where is the place of understanding?

We spend money and time to educate ourselves, to get information and hopefully understanding, but wisdom, Job says ([28:23](#)), wisdom is in God's hands: "God understands the way to it, and he knows its place." Finally, by chapter [40: 3-5](#), Job learns the beginning of wisdom:

Then Job answered the LORD and said:
"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but I will proceed no further."

Job says, "Shut my mouth," and learns the beginning of wisdom is to be quiet and revere God, trusting him in all things. While it is hard, we need to learn the same thing and, along with the prophet Habakkuk, accede to "But the LORD [YAHWEH] is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him." [Habakkuk 2:20](#)

So, there is a big difference between what is expressed in chapter ten's title, *God's Wisdom and Ours*, and it goes back to Eve in the garden, who allows herself to be deceived by the serpent into not trusting the wisdom of God and wanting to know and decide for herself. Since then, we have grown to know so much about so many things, but we have so little wisdom to make that knowledge work to enrich our lives. Why? The short answer is sin. It distorts everything, corrupting our understanding and denuding our wisdom.

We are dependent on God for our wisdom. Moses told the Israelites in [Deuteronomy 29:4](#), "But to this day, the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear." We cannot apprehend the wisdom God has to offer unless we listen to Him. Paul warned the Corinthians ([1 Corinthians 2:14](#)), "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." We may think we are wise and smart without God, but Paul said otherwise ([1 Corinthians 3:18-20](#)), "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness" and again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

Packer presents two basic prerequisites to gaining Godly wisdom:

- **Reverence for God**—"Fear of the Lord [reverence for God] is the beginning of wisdom" ([Proverbs 1:7](#), [Proverbs 9:10](#), [Proverbs 15:33](#), [Psalm 111:10](#))
- **Willingness to receive from God**—God does not force wisdom upon us; we must work for it. Throughout the Old Testament, those who study (meditate on) God's law (statutes/Word) become wise. Paul carries this forward to the Christian when he tells the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...with all wisdom." ([Colossians 3:16](#)) In his instruction to Timothy, he admonishes him that "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#))

Packer again expresses his concern about the modern Christian, arguing that they never become wise because they have so little knowledge of the Scriptures. We are fools and remain fools all our lives he laments because we spend so much time on entertainment (when he wrote this in the 70's with newspapers, today with television, the Internet, games, and as fans of various sports) and leave God and his Word as an afterthought.

Review of Section Two: Behold Your God!

4. From the moment Pilate responded to Jesus with “What is truth?” our unwillingness to be tied down to absolutes was painfully apparent. Why is the truth of God’s Word so significant to us, especially today?

(p. 109ff) When Jesus told Pilate, “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice,” Pilate, reflecting on the world’s approach to the answer, replied, “What is truth?” That pretty much hits the nail on the head and drives it home. When the truth is staring you in the face (Jesus: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” [John 14:6](#)), do you, like Pilate, step to the side and avoid facing the demand? Or do you bow your knee to God only Wise and accept his definition of what is true?

Packer notes that Christianity begins with two facts about God founded in the Word, and they are assumptions or *a priories* used by Packer for this chapter:

1. **God is King** – He rules with absolute authority. He governs us, establishing the government itself.
2. **God speaks** – God has spoken to his people and, as King, expects his people to respond to what he has said. He engages through his Word and Spirit “our minds and hearts (we are creatures and subjects, and he relates to us directly—he fellowships with us.)”

Packer says that the God who speaks is at least four things:

- He is **creative** through his spoken Word, “...and God said, ‘Let...’” Eight times, Packer notes, God did this, and everything sprang into being and into order.
- He **communicates** with us and tells us what He wants from us. He does not leave us to guess what He expects. God spoke with Adam, giving him commands, testimony, prohibition, and promise.
- The Word of God is **determinative**, and he gives power to his prophets, such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, etc., to proclaim his truth, to uproot or to plant, to tear down and destroy, or to build nations and kingdoms by the proclamation of his Word.
- He **judges** us by how we **respond** to His Word: either refusing and therefore wicked ([Jeremiah 13:10](#)) or fearfully humble and godly ([Isaiah 66:2](#)).

The Word is so important because it has the claim of absolute truth—Its author is “the God of truth.” ([Psalm 31:5](#); [Isaiah 65:16](#)) Packer argues that biblical truth is primarily a quality of persons (including the person of God) and only secondarily of propositions (statements of truth affirmation). Biblical truth is not a philosophical abstract but a real quality, lived out in God’s interaction with His creation. That is significant because it removes the argument that “your truth” and “my truth” exists—there is only God’s truth.

5. Love is bandied about these days like an emotional volleyball, being redefined within each existential moment. Why is love, as defined by the very nature of God, so important?

(p. 117ff) When one begins to understand that agape (ἀγάπη), the Greek word for love that God uses to describe himself, is defined by sacrificial action (not emotive feelings), God’s faithful love of his unique creation comes into better focus.

In our American culture, “love” has been so watered down that it often could be parodied as “Luv,” a true caricature of itself. That is the problem with biblical study for many people; it calls into question so much of (wait for it) the water in which we swim that when we begin to realize how fouled our everyday environment is, we wonder if there is any way we can get it cleaned up, even a little bit. Sometimes, I wish I could give my brain a good scrubbing.

Several generalities about Christians and their understanding of love seem to be valid:

- They have never thought about love’s real meaning in depth.
- They do not realize the theological significance of any anthropomorphic backwardness they might have about love, letting their “experiences of love define God.
- When they finally understand the real issues and the truth of the matter, they begin to question almost

everything about their lives.

Remember Packer's point that experiencing the love of God is a "normal part of ordinary Christian experience." Normal, not special or esoteric, it is the expected thing. Packer notes that God **floods** us with his love, the regular ministry of the Holy Spirit. This flooding is God's loving action, not some emotional high. Though that may sometimes be part of it, it is never the root, only some of the delicious fruit.

Packer says that as a Christian, "God is love" expresses the complete truth for us because it "means that his love finds expression in everything that he says and does." This is where the rubber meets the road of our spiritual journey of discipleship. Packer notes, "Everything that happens to us expresses God's love to us, and come to us to further God's purpose for us...at every moment and in every event of every day's life. Even when we cannot see the why and the wherefore of God's dealings, we know that there is [Godly] love in and behind them, and so we can rejoice always, even when, humanly speaking, things are going wrong."

There you have the crux of the matter, the nexus points on which it all turns. Creation and we within it are who and what we are because of God's willingness to act self-sacrificially (agape—ἀγάπη) on our behalf. Think about that for a moment.

6. When we hear grace, we think of someone who acts with an elegant gentleness. However, our culture has lost the Biblical concept of grace, as the unmerited favor of God. How can we make it real again?

(p. 128ff) The essence of Grace is gifting, the offering of free and unmerited favor. It is the basis of the action of charity, a grace gift freely given to someone. Most of God's grace is whispered to us, though there are moments of profound shouting, like when I missed that car careening into my lane. However, God's loving whispers get so easily drowned out by the cacophony of modern existence, one advantage our earlier brethren had over us, though I venture most of us fail to see it.

Packer argues that only personal activity can be connected to love, and agape, the love of God expressed by us, is personal sacrificial activity. Grace's root is agape (sacrifice in action). It also speaks against the view of the Holy Spirit as a kind of "celestial electricity."

Grace, according to Packer, deals with four truths that need to be understood but are not, resulting in four problems:

- Moral ill-desert of man—we are not basically good
- Retributive justice of God—God gives us what we deserve
- Spiritual Impotence of man—we cannot save ourselves
- Sovereign freedom of God—God is not beholden to anyone but himself

We are a sow's ear masquerading as a silk purse despite what we tell ourselves. We lie to ourselves, excusing every failure, shortcoming, and outright evil as little peccadilloes while magnifying even the smallest virtues as towering accomplishments. Simply put, we will not face the music, instead dissemble at every turn, pulling an Obi-Wan Kenobi on ourselves: "You are not acting that badly; that wasn't really evil; you deserved that pleasure."—think of the McDonald's slogan, "You deserve a break today." We believe it with a wave of the hand and proper rationalization. After all, we tell ourselves, "I am fundamentally a good person."

Underneath it all is the denial that God's demands are legitimate, and even if we are Christians and give God some of his due, we refuse to deal with the magnitude of what God requires. Paganism, even Christian paganism, argues that "God will forgive—that's his job." This is not true, as Romans 9:16 strongly states, "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." God's job is to be God and, as such, to act according to his will for his reasons, not ours. He is sovereign, and the choice of grace is his and his alone. He is never required to act and only does so by his own choice for his own purpose.

I would add to Packer's references in chapter twelve [Philippians 1:6](#) "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." We persevere because Christ perseveres with us, sustaining us. [1 Corinthians 1:7-9](#)

Review of Section Two: Behold Your God!

7. It is politically incorrect to judge anyone, to make them uncomfortable, to *diss* them in any way. Does our culture let anyone or anything sit in judgment? How does that influence us, whether we want it to admit it or not, and what do you think God thinks about it?

(p. 138) Not only do we resist God judging us, we don't like the idea of anyone sitting in judgment over us. In the inner-city and gang cultures, they call it *dissing*, which started out as insulting someone but has since expanded to mere criticism, and all judgment is criticism. When you judge someone, you criticize them; you question them, bringing out all of their defenses.

God does not judge just the bad, though that is a certainty; he judges everything, including what we see as good. As Packer says: "The one basic certainty underlying all discussion of life's problems in Job, Ecclesiastes, and all the practical maxims of Proverbs is that "God will bring you to judgment." [Ecclesiastes 11:9](#) This is not Old Testament fear-mongering. The New Testament is grounded in the certainty of the universal judgment and the assurance, given by Peter, that judgment begins with us, the Church, the children of God. [1 Peter 4:17](#)

There are four things that put God as judge in context:

1. **Authority**—Judges have authority, and God has supreme authority as King of the World.
2. **Represent the good and right**—Judges stand for the moral order and biblically want right to triumph over wrong. God, as judge, loves the righteous and hates iniquity.
3. **Discerns truth using wisdom**—Judges weigh the facts and discern the truth, and God, as omniscient (knowing all facts) and the epitome of wisdom, knows the truth about everything. As the last phrase uttered by God in [Genesis 18:21](#) says, "...I will know."
4. **Sentence execution power**—God, the judge, not only has the authority to declare a verdict but also the power to carry out the sentence. As Packer notes, "God is his own executioner."

To those who would appeal to Jesus in an attempt to contrast him with the Father, Packer notes that in the Anglican burial service, Jesus is addressed as "holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal," the one who "will separate the people one from another." [Matthew 25:32](#) As [John 5:27](#) notes, it is "because he is the Son of Man." This Judgment before Christ = "the terror of the Lord." [2 Corinthians 5:11](#) We must never forget that none of us is fit to face Christ in judgment. As Paul laments in [Romans 7:14b-15](#), "...I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."

But we also should never forget that judgment ends in eternal life and has the purpose of stripping from us all that is not holy and blameless so that we may be presented to the Son as an unblemished bride. [Ephesians 5:27](#)

8. When was the last time you heard wrath used in a sentence that wasn't Christian-related? It is not a popular concept. However, why is it so significant to the Christian message?

(p. 148ff) Without understanding the wrath of God, how can you relate to the salvation being offered in Jesus Christ? They are intimately entwined in the Christian message, the Christian Gospel.

Packer uses Job as his object lesson. Job correctly understood that there was no one who could arbitrate between him and God. Who would intercede, he asks, understanding what Samuel would later ask, "If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" [1 Samuel 2:25a](#) We, however, know the answer; the mystery has been revealed: "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." [Romans 8:34](#)

Wrath is anger acting in punishment, vengeance, or divine retribution for sin. It is instantiated (made concrete and real) in action, which is why anger never justifies our acting out. Wrath (the acting out) belongs to God alone. We can get angry but are never justified or allowed to act personally to resolve our anger. Only God acts on his anger through his wrath. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." [Romans 12:19](#) This ability

does not belong to us.

Sadly, Packer has to make an effort to rescue God from those who deem this aspect of God's character unworthy of him. Maybe that is why some heretics deny a personal God, since we don't think of gravity as cruel—it just is; in the same way, if God is not personal, then it is easier to deal with all of the pain and suffering we wish God would take away.

With that in mind, two things must be considered about God's wrath:

1. **It is judicial**—God's wrath is His justice, properly directed. It is righteous and righteously administered. [Romans 2:5-6](#) Despite all sin separating us from God, there is proportionality to the punishment for sin.
2. **We choose it**—We choose sin and rebellion. Some say they only want to be free, but freedom without the necessary restraints that define the proper boundaries is not freedom; it's a self-indulgent mess. You may want to be free of your bones, but without their constraints, what would you be?

Romans tells us the meaning and revelation of and how to be delivered from God's wrath.

- **Meaning**—It is just punishment for sin, which demonstrates God's proper execution of justice and his hatred of evil.
- **Revelation**—It is constantly disclosed, imprinted on our consciences, confirmed by the Word, and demonstrated in the here and now. The tokens of God's wrath are there to see for anyone who wants to see them.
- **Deliverance**—Saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, [Romans 5:9](#), and as a result, there is no condemnation for those in Christ. [Romans 8:1](#) But, going back to question 4:2, what will we choose?

God's wrath is real, and the hard part is dealing with the true and deep fear in our souls for the God with whom we have to do, "For our God is a consuming fire." [Hebrews 12:29](#) We started this study with the goal and desire to know God and be known of him, but as I said before, God is who God is, not who we may want him to be.

9. Our idea of fairness doesn't seem to include anything that could be judged severely. God is both good and severe. Why is this balance so important to our Christian life?

(p. 158) ***Trying to balance our understanding and acceptance of the goodness and severity of God is one of the most difficult efforts we face as Christian disciples.*** While there are other such dichotomies in our life of sanctification and discipleship, e.g., God's transcendence and personal interaction with us, Jesus being God and man, and the absolute sovereignty of God and our absolute responsibility, this goes to our sense of trust that God is indeed working out everything for our good, [Romans 8:28](#) and that everything that happens in our life, our sovereign Father means it for our eternal good. Our problem is we too easily take the short view, while God is working out the whole of human history and destiny according to his will and purpose. While he may call us to great sacrifice, it will always be for our best. It is hard to accept being the clay on the potter's wheel, but that is what Christian discipleship comes down to.

We need to remember that the concept of "fairness" that so often drives our judgment of events and circumstances is tainted; it is distorted by sin to elevate our sense of self: self-importance, self-pride, self-conceit, and on and on for all of the fallen aspects of self, which are so easily injured and so quickly voice their complaints against God. Deep in our old man is the ongoing refrain, "If God truly loved **ME**, he wouldn't do this." Rather than sacrificial agape, the old man fights to express self-pride and self-importance.

We must trust in God's goodness throughout all the experiences of his severity; we must learn to be like Job.

10. People hate the idea of a jealous God. Why? What demand does God's jealousy make on them? What demand does it make on you?

(p. 167ff) I believe people hate the idea of a jealous God because divine jealousy cannot be reasoned away. Such a fundamental response indicts the one causing it with unavoidable judgment followed by divine wrath. To state it in the short form, it scares them to death.

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What it should do is scare them to repentance, which is the demand that God's jealousy makes on everyone who invokes it. So, we try to dismiss it, claiming it is beneath God, using the corrupted version evident everywhere in the human condition to argue God couldn't possibly be like that. Technically, the argument is correct; God is not like that, but we only succeed because we have distorted the definition. It has been said that "he who controls the definition controls the argument," and it is never truer than in this case.

The response to the last question will be highly personal, but for me, it makes everything between God and me personal. Jealousy is a personal response from a personal God and means I have done something very personal to God with my sin. That removes the academic distance and strikes directly at my heart.

What to Do Next

Begin Section Three by reading Chapter Eighteen: *The Heart of the Gospel*. Meditate on what it means to pay an unpayable debt and what that means to Jesus Christ, the Son.

The foundation has been laid, and we can now proceed to its application. The Section title, "If God Be for Us," encompasses the support foundation for all five application chapters. Now that we have grasped the goodness and severity of the God with whom we have to do, we can go straight to the heart of the Christian Gospel wrapped up in Christmas and Easter.

Goal: We want to always remember that when we look at God, He, not we, defines what we see.

Remember, God is. He is YAHWEH, the I AM. It is not for us to try and change Him. It is for Him to change us and our understanding of who He is. Moses wanted to see God face to face but was told that would destroy him. We, His children, however, reborn in Jesus Christ, will one day know Him as we are known, will see Him face to face.

I have often thought of this study akin to a blind date. Students go in with all sorts of expectations, hopes, and biases on who God will be when they finally get a good look at him. In the end, he is always different than what they expected. In a way, it is similar to me. Each time I go through the study my understanding of God becomes both more clear and more clouded. It is clearer that I continue to shed false views of him, but more clouded because the closer I get, the more I realize how little I grasp his immense and truly unfathomable complexity. I guess that is why I have never liked systematic theology—it seems too pat, too calculating. Notice, I didn't say untrue because, in its reasoning, the best of it is logically and rationally sound in its biblical application. However, it is too academically sterile for my unimaginably personal God.

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Taking a moment to look back and review what you have just completed is an important part of the learning experience, especially when you ask yourself some basic questions such as:

1. What things stick in my mind about this section?
2. Why are those things important to me?
3. How will dealing with those things change my life?

Teachers often have their own agenda. They have important points they want you to get out of the information they have just presented to you. While that is a valid and necessary approach to learning, creating a foundation on which to build the next story of your understanding, I have found through experience that when you study God, no teacher can direct what happens to, is important to, or the changes to those who enter this journey. It is one thing to study God, say in a class on theology, and it is another thing to desire with all your heart to know God, which is the study's goal.

So, while I may point out some of the high points of this section, I believe those three questions are the most significant elements of your interaction with what you have just completed. Having read Packer's book thus far,

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you have been systematically exposed to the important and foundational material you need to know God. However, our loving Father deals with each of us individually, and because of that, what he is dealing with you from Section Two is unique to your relationship with him. That is why I do not worry too much about whether the students joining me on this journey get it all worked out. Your only job is to deal with what God is doing in you right now, and the rest will follow in due course.

The early 21st Century has presented the challenge of open theism (see this [posting at Challes.com](#)) to the Christian Church. I disagree with this theology, but without being sidetracked by the argument, I do want to say that the problem Packer addresses in this section is whether or not we are satisfied with seeing God as he is, what Scripture and his witness in creation tell us about him, or do we want to remake God in an image that is more pleasing to how we think he ought to be. This is the path of open theism.

In the last four chapters of this section, Packer tackles this problem head-on by addressing the attributes of God that most Christians find difficult to deal with. I think the underlying premise of the open theism argument is its dissatisfaction with our understanding of God as presented and understood. That leads them to cast about for a different way to see God, to find a way to speak reasonably (from their perspective) to contemporary science and philosophy.

I believe that Packer faces that issue directly and does it by letting God be God. In doing so, he allows God to define himself by his revelation in both Word and Creation, as well as in deed and flesh (Christ Jesus). Since that approach may not answer all the seemingly urgent questions raised by science and philosophy, open theism comfortably postulates a God who has limits, especially as related to the future and God's ability to control the course of historical events (we should note that this approach frees the holders to be meaningful change agents and personally powerful), which frees them from many of the thorny questions. The problem is that it does not match the biblical God of Scripture and creation. I will forever embrace Yul Brenner's straightforward statement in the movie *The Ten Commandments*, where, playing Ramses, he tells his queen, after the destruction of his chariots in the Red Sea, "Moses' God is God."

It may be fashionable to feel that due to the current pace of scientific inquiry and the expansion of the human knowledge base, we should be able to place demands on our understanding of God. Indeed, if we acknowledge him, we can redefine our past views. Some argue that God is no longer absolute but instead relative and limited. However, we must respond that Scripture does not support this view and remind them of Paul's argument: "Let God be true, and every man a liar." [Romans 3:4](#)

Rather than becoming Pharisees seeking some reasonable and logically manipulative way to get our views of God to fit into how we want things to be, we need to bow our knees in submission to God, as all creation will do in the end. [Philippians 2:9-11](#) In a way, this is a rerun of Job's discussion with God. Why, how, what for? I want to know. I need to know. In the end, God said no. You need to trust me and take what I say as what I say. Job complied and said shut my mouth. In the end, he never learned the reason, but he did learn submission, something in short supply today, even among professing Christians.

Theology presents us with both a great opportunity and great danger. It allows us to learn more about the God we worship. The danger arises when we think we know enough to define God ourselves and, in the process, discover something new about him, something earlier Christians missed. Compounding the danger is the modern educational and doctrinal system, which requires novelty to support itself and its proliferating degree system. It needs new ideas, new theories, and new postulations. In science, this is seen as good, as these explorations enlarge our circle of knowledge. However, in theology, especially Christian biblical theology, what we know about God is limited by revelation embedded within the Word. While applying that limited knowledge is endless, the revealed knowledge is finite. After 2000 years of Christian theology, we constantly bump up against the limits of revelation. When that happens, we have a choice, the same choice offered to Job and his counselors: to trust God and accept that our knowledge is limited or to speculate and try and extend our knowledge of God with reason and philosophy, trying to drive back the edges of the mist by the force of our logic and our accumulated knowledgebase from all areas of human understanding. Ultimately, I think it comes down to the first question and the first temptation, "Did God really say? You will know..." [Genesis 3:1-4](#)

God, from the beginning, set limits on our knowledge, and from the beginning, we have rebelled against those limits. Eve came up against those limits and rebelled. Job came up against those limits and accepted them. God

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put them there for a reason, and he has told us to trust him. We all face the same choices Eve and Job faced. Some have responded by chucking out the whole framework and redefining everything (witness the modern Episcopal Church and its apostles of modernity). Others respond by redefining God, in my mind, committing the same sin Job's counselors who God judged.

After the LORD had spoken his demands to Job, who accepted them, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite:

My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now, therefore, take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

[Job 42:7-8](#)

So, our ultimate folly is wanting God to be other than he is, demanding that our understanding, our will, and our desire define him. No. In the end, we need to echo Job.

I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. [Job 42:1-6](#)

That is where we stand: either to be like Job and be willing to repent in dust and ashes of our desire to press past the boundaries God has set or refuse and be like Eve (and Job's counselors) and use whatever we can find so that we can know (or pretend to know) what we want to know. It's your choice.

May God give us the grace to see by faith with the eyes of Job, thereby avoiding the errors of his counselors. May we always be willing to accept God as he is and submit to whatever he demands of us. In the end, He will have the final Word, not us. He is, after all, God.