

BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT GOD THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

Lesson 9: God is All-Present

Biblical doctrine is the study of what the Bible teaches about God and other important truths. Our previous lessons have been:

1. The One True God
2. God is Three in One
3. God is Eternal Spirit
4. God is the Creator
5. God is the Sovereign Ruler
6. God is Perfect
7. God is All-Knowing (Omniscient)
8. God is All-Powerful (Omnipotent)

MAIN TRUTH, CENTRAL SCRIPTURE, AND OUTLINE

God is all-present (omnipresent). God is present everywhere through all creation at all times, and no one can escape Him. Even those who seek to hide from Him cannot find darkness that is dark enough to cover them. He is constantly and fully present throughout the physical and spiritual realms.

(Psalm 139:7-12)

1. God's pervasive presence (Ps. 139:7-12)

God does not have any spatial limitations as do His creatures. He fills the heavens and the earth (Jer. 23:24).

- A. His presence throughout the physical realm

From the heights of heaven to the depths of earth God is equally present everywhere and at all times. The psalmist asks, "Where shall I go from thy spirit? Or where shall I flee from thy presence?" (Ps. 139:7). Anywhere a person may go, God is there. Running from Him is futile, as neither distance nor location can shield you from His presence. He is present in every place and with every creature since distance is nothing to Him (Ps. 139:8-10). You could go from one end of the universe to the other and still never escape God. Neither is God's presence limited by any condition. Even complete darkness cannot separate a person from God (Ps. 139:11-12).

- B. His presence throughout the spiritual realm

There is no space that can contain or limit God (1 Kings 8:27). From heaven to hell and everywhere in between, the Lord is undeniably present. The psalmist exclaims, "If I ascend up

into heaven, you are there” (Ps. 139:8). What make heaven such a blessed place is the reality of God’s presence. The joy of paradise is God Himself, since He is the believer’s chief pursuit and desire (Ps. 16:11; 37:4; 42:1; 73:25). The ultimate blessing of heaven will be God’s own presence and the privilege of His redeemed people to glorify and enjoy Him forever. Not only is God in heaven, He is also in hell. The reality of hell is not the absence of God, but the full presence of His justice and wrath where He will eternally punish His enemies in both body and soul (Mt. 10:28). The most dreadful part of hell is God’s presence there, pouring out His righteous wrath upon sinners forever for not obeying the gospel (2 Th. 1:8; Rev. 14:10-11).

2. God’s relational presence (Ps. 139:7-12)

God’s presence is the greatest horror for unbelievers, and at the same time, the greatest comfort for believers.

A. God’s presence with the unbeliever

Distance and darkness may veil the murderer, thief, and other sinners from human scrutiny. The unbeliever loves darkness because it shields his evil deeds from exposure, but no one can hide or disguise himself from God, no matter where he goes (Job 34:22; Jer. 23:23-24). For unbelievers, God’s presence causes dread, unless by His grace, He converts the sinner and forgives him. The omnipresent God knows every detail of man’s sinfulness, and all sinners must eventually acknowledge their sinful condition in His holy presence. The sinner’s only hope of escaping God’s righteous judgment is to trust in Jesus Christ, who lived and died for His people so that they may live eternally in God’s blessed presence.

B. God’s presence with the believer

Distance and darkness cannot come between believers and God. Whether they face physical darkness or simply a difficult time in life, all believers can rely on God because He abides with them always (Ps. 23:4; 63:5-8; Heb. 13:5). For believers, God’s omnipresence provides joy, assurance, and comfort.

MEMORY VERSES

Psalms 139:7 *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

Proverbs 15:3 *The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*

Jeremiah 23:24 *Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.*

ADDITIONAL NOTES

The following notes are from *The Holy One: A Handbook of Biblical Truth about God*, a book being written by Pastor Stan with a projected publishing date in the early part of 2024.

God is an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

AUGUSTINE (354-430 A.D.)

He (God) is present with all creatures at the same time, preserving and upholding them in their beings and operations. He exists everywhere undivided in his being. He is not part here and part there. He exists infinitely even beyond our world. His nature is infinite, and therefore cannot be bounded.

EZEKIEL HOPKINS (1634-1690)

Few other truths are taught in the Scriptures with as great clarity as the doctrine of the divine omnipresence. Those passages supporting this truth are so plain that it would take considerable effort to misunderstand them. They declare that God is immanent in His creation, that there is no place in heaven or earth or hell where men may hide from His presence. They teach that God is at once far off and near, and that in Him men move and live and have their being.

A. W. TOZER (1897-1963)

DEFINITION OF GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE

God's presence is everywhere. God's omnipresence includes his attributes of transcendence and immanence. He is above and beyond all created beings and yet He is present with and among His creation. At the same time God is separate from His creation.

1. Wayne Grudem: "God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places" (*Systematic Theology*, 173).

3. Steven Lawson: "This astonishing attribute speaks to the reality that He is everywhere present, every moment, with the fullness of His entire being" (*Show Me Your Glory*, 107).

4. Louis Berkhof: "In a certain sense the terms "immensity" and "omnipresence," as applied to God, denote the same thing, and can therefore be regarded as synonymous. Yet there is a point of difference that should be carefully noted. "Immensity" points to the fact that God transcends all space and is not subject to its limitations, while "omnipresence" denotes that He nevertheless fills every part of space with His entire Being" (*Systematic Theology*, 61).

5. Emery Bancroft: "By this (omnipresence) we mean that God, in the totality of His essence, without diffusion or expansion, multiplication or division, penetrates and fills the universe in all its parts... God's omnipresence is not the presence of a part, but of the whole of God in every place. This follows from the conception of God as incorporeal." He adds, "When God is said to 'dwell in the heavens' we are to understand the language either as a symbolic expression of exaltation above earthly things, or as a declaration that His most special and glorious self-manifestations are in heaven" (*Christian Theology: Systematic and Biblical*, 79).

6. MacArthur and Mayhue: "God is perfectly with himself, transcending all limitation of space, and yet present with every point of space with all that he is. Transcendence means that God is greater than and independent of the creation. Immensity refers to the fact that God transcends and fills all space. And omnipresence indicates that God is present with every point of space in his entire being" (*Biblical Doctrine*, 173).

BIBLICAL REVELATION ABOUT GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE

1. God is present everywhere.

Psalms 139:7-10 ⁷ *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? ⁸ If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; ¹⁰ Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.*

The word “omnipresent” (from Latin *omni*, all) refers to the state of being present everywhere at once. Omnipresence does not mean that part of God is here and part of God is somewhere else, but God is present in all His fullness in every place at the same time.

2. God cannot be limited or confined by space.

We should not think of God in terms of size or space because He exists without any limitations or measurements. God is uncreated Spirit (Jn. 4:24). God existed before He created the universe. He is both present in His creation but also distinct from His creation.

1 Kings 8:27 *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?*

2 Chronicles 2:6 *But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him?*

Isaiah 66:1 *Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?*

Acts 7:48-49 ⁴⁸ *Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, ⁴⁹ Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?*

Grudem comments: “While the thought that God is everywhere present with his whole being ought to encourage us greatly in prayer no matter where we are, the fact that no one place can be said to contain God should also discourage us from thinking that there is some special place of worship that gives people special access to God: he cannot be contained in any one place” (*Systematic Theology*, 174). Bancroft concurs: “God’s omnipresence assures us that He is present with us to hear—and present in every heart and in the ends of the earth to answer—prayer” (*Christian Theology: Systematic and Biblical*, 80).

3. God is present everywhere, but He is separate from His creation.

Acts 17:24-28 ²⁴ *God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; ²⁵ Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; ²⁶ And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷ That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every*

one of us: ²⁸ For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Colossians 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (hold together).

Paul Washer writes: “Whether man acknowledges it or not, the reality of God is inescapable. There is no place that He is not. Furthermore, all things were made by Him and continue to be sustained by Him. He set the universe in motion and sustains it. The most colossal star and the smallest particle exist because of Him. The life of every creature, great or small, is dependent upon Him” (*Knowing the Living God*, 72).

4. God fills heaven and earth, and He is both far off and near.

Psalms 113:4-6 ⁴ The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. ⁵ Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, ⁶ Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

Jeremiah 23:23-24 ²³ Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? ²⁴ Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.

In summary, Scripture describes God as being both *transcendent* (above and separate from His creation) and *immanent* (present with His creation). Grudem suggests the helpful although imperfect analogy of a sponge filled with water: “Water is present everywhere in the sponge, but the water is still completely distinct from the sponge.” He concedes however that the analogy breaks down because “the analogy is dealing with two materials that have spatial characteristics and dimensions, while God does not” (*Systematic Theology*, 175).

5. God is present in various ways and places.

A. He dwells in heaven.

Deuteronomy 26:15 Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey.

Matthew 6:9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

B. He descends from heaven.

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

Genesis 11:5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

Exodus 3:7-8 ⁷ And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; ⁸ And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place

of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

C. He dwells in the midst of His people.

Exodus 40:34-35 ³⁴ *Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.* ³⁵ *And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*

1 Kings 8:10-11 ¹⁰ *And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD,* ¹¹ *So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD.*

D. He is separated from and far (relationally) from the wicked.

Proverbs 15:29 *The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.*

Isaiah 59:2 *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*

This distance between God and sinners is relational, not geographical. We use this kind of language when we say: "My siblings are not close to each other." Grudem explains: "When the Bible talks about God being 'far away' it usually means he is 'not present to bless'" (*Systematic Theology*, 177).

E. He is near (relationally) to the righteous and dwells with the humble.

Isaiah 57:15 *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

John Snyder makes the helpful distinction between God's essential presence, His manifest presence, and His cultivated presence. God's essential presence is His omnipresence in the universe. His manifest presence is when He chooses to make His essential presence known or obvious to people. It is an intense awareness of God's glory. His cultivated presence comes to those who have the kind of heart and life to which God delights to draw near (*Behold Your God*, 241-245).

F. He dwells in Christ's physical body.

Colossians 2:9 *For in him (Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*

G. He dwells in the church.

1 Corinthians 3:16 *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*

H. He dwells in all of His redeemed people.

John 14:23 *Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*

1 Corinthians 6:19 *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*

6. God is present for special reasons.

A. He is present to bless His people.

Grudem states: "Although the Bible can speak of God as being present everywhere, when the Bible says that God is 'present' it usually means 'present to bless'" (*Systematic Theology*, 177).

Exodus 33:14-16 ¹⁴ *And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. ¹⁵ And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. ¹⁶ For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.*

Deuteronomy 4:7 *For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?*

Psalms 16:11 *In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.*

Isaiah 55:6 *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.*

James 4:8 *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.*

Revelation 21:3 *And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*

And what kind of habitation pleases God? What must our natures be like before He can feel at home with us? He asks nothing but a pure heart and a single mind.

A. W. TOZER (1897-1963)

B. He is present to guide and sustain His people.

Psalms 23:3-4 ³ *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

Isaiah 41:10 *Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

C. He is present to protect His people.

Isaiah 43:1-2 ¹ *But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. ² When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*

D. He is present to equip and support His servants.

Exodus 4:10-12 ¹⁰ *And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.* ¹¹ *And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?* ¹² *Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.*

Matthew 28:19-20 ¹⁹ *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:* ²⁰ *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

E. He is present to examine and evaluate our ways and works.

Job 34:21-22 ²¹ *For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings.* ²² *There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.*

Proverbs 5:21 *For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings.*

Proverbs 15:3 *The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*

The reality of God's omnipresence should have a powerful and gracious influence upon us, as described in this illustration: "When you wish to do something evil, you retire from the public into your house where no enemy may see you; from those places of your house which are open and visible to the eyes of men you remove yourself into your room; even in your room you fear some witness from another quarter; you retire into your heart, there you meditate: he is more inward than your heart. Wherever, therefore, you shall have fled, there he is. From yourself, whither will you flee? Will you not follow yourself wherever you flee? But since there is One more inward even than yourself, there is no place where you may flee from God angry but to God reconciled. There is no place at all whither you may flee. Will you flee from him? Flee unto him" (Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, 164; cited in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 177).

F. He is present to correct the disobedient and punish the wicked.

Psalms 21:8 *Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee.*

Amos 9:2-4 ² *Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down:* ³ *And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them:* ⁴ *And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good.*

Jonah 1:3-4 ³ *But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.* ⁴ *But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.*

Revelation 14:10-11 *The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.*

Although this text in Revelation 14 speaks of the presence of the Lamb (Christ) with those who experience God's eternal punishment, this does not speak of His favorable presence. Lawson explains: "The favor of His countenance will be withdrawn. They will not experience the smile of His face in hell. Relationally separated from Him, they will nevertheless face the fierce frown of His anger. In their presence, God will unleash on them the endless execution of His vengeance. They will forever be the object of His unmitigated wrath, never to escape the divine fury of eternal destruction, as an outpouring of His justice" (*Show Me Your Glory*, 116).

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE

1. For the Christian, the omnipresence of God instills confidence and comfort. Every believer is blessed by God's constant presence.

Hebrews 13:5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

2. For the unbeliever, the omnipresence of God instills uneasiness and terror. There is no escape from God's holy presence and eternal judgment.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND MEDITATION

1. How would you define God's omnipresence?
2. According to Louis Berkhof what is the difference between God's immensity and omnipresence?
3. Should we think of God in terms of size or space? Why or why not?
4. Washer writes: "Whether man acknowledges it or not, the reality of God is inescapable." How should this affect a person's life?
5. Is God both transcendent and immanent? How would you explain this?
6. How can God be present everywhere and yet be "far from the wicked"?
7. What does Snyder say about God's essential presence, His manifest presence, and His cultivated presence?
8. In what way is God present to punish the wicked in hell?
9. Does the reality of God's omnipresence comfort you or cause you to be uneasy? Why?

All we want, all we need, is God's ungrieved presence with us always.
AMY CARMICHAEL (1867-1951)

What caves or thickets can men hide in that God cannot find them? Go where they may, He is present. If a man owes a debt to another, he may make his escape and flee into another land, where the creditor cannot find him. But 'whither shall I flee from thy presence?' Sinners can neither go from an accusing conscience, not from a revenging God.

THOMAS WATSON (1620-1686)

Do nothing that you would not like God to see. Say nothing you would not like God to hear... Go no place where you would not like God to find you. Never spend your time in such a way that you would not like God to say, "What are you doing?"

J. C. RYLE (1816-1900)