

WIKI GOD

**THE DANGEROUS
EDITABLE DEITY**

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To Aiden,

Your voice finally gave me the permission to speak of God
in a way that my soul had always longed to proclaim.

PREFACE

My name is Travis Agnew. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, a husband to Amanda, a father to the best kids in the world, a pastor who still loves the opportunity to make disciples within the local church, and a creative who loves to share resources through blog posts, podcasts, and books. And that's where we find ourselves today. You are holding in your hands a book concept that has been simmering in my soul for almost twenty years before it was finally released.

I began following Jesus when I was seven years old. Like every believer, I've had times of encouraging growth and times of glaring apathy. My story has significant milestones along the way that formed me into who I am. One such pivotal moments happened while listening to a sermon when I was in college. The preacher casually mentioned a quote from some guy named A.W. Tozer. I have no idea what he said afterward because my mind and heart were being undone as I wrestled with the quote's claims.

"What comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you." I wanted to object with the deceased Tozer, but I could not. Knowing God is my greatest pursuit. To understand him should be my highest priority. My theology will dictate my life. After the service that day, I searched out the writings of Tozer and was introduced to his teachings on the attributes of God. His lofty depictions of God infected my mind in the most glorious of ways. He gave me permission to think and to speak boldly about God.

During that time, I was finally becoming the Bible student that I always knew I should be. I truly developed a love for meditating and memorizing the Word of God. It was life-changing. I began to see the Bible as a description of God rather than a self-help book for me. As I scoured the pages, I began to understand and cherish the God of the Bible rather than the opinions of the culture. While training for ministry, I was given opportunities to preach and teach in different con-

texts. As often as I could, I would teach the attributes of God in some way. One of the first studies I ever did with a group of college students was the initial version of the outline of this book. I cherished each and every opportunity to teach others regarding the importance of knowing the biblically accurate attributes of God.

I drafted chapters of this book over the years, but fear of falling short kept putting it back on the shelf. Recently, I taught the attributes of God to a diverse group of men going through addiction recovery. As I walked men who were raised in the church and those who were having their first exposure in our presence, I once again realized the desperate nature of proper theology. We cannot love a God whom we do not know. We cannot follow God if we don't know his direction. After the completion of the study, I decided to number my days (Ps. 90:12) and get this book finished because I will never arrive at a place where I can adequately describe God in a manner of which he is worthy.

For some reason unknown to me, you have this copy in your hand right now. Due to a level of trust you have in me (which makes me tremble), a gift given to you on behalf of someone else (which makes me chuckle), or a random pickup by happenstance (which makes me anticipate), you have this content before you. My prayer is that God will use this book to flood your mind with biblical truth and overwhelm your soul with glorious wonder at the God who was and who is and who is to come. I hope that it will serve as a catalyst for you to engage in a lifelong pursuit of knowing the God of the Bible more.

To my family, thank you for allowing me the blessed opportunity of sharing what I'm still learning from the Bible as we sit around the table, curl up on the couch, adventure by the creek, or stretch out on your bedroom floor.

To my church family, thank you for pushing me to know God intimately and allowing me to speak of him boldly as we make a valiant effort of making disciples who make disciples.

To my God, "You have taught me from my youth, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds" (Ps. 71:17). I have yet to get over you, and I suspect I never will.

CHAPTER 1: THE EDITABLE GOD

“Wiki” is a type of website that allows collaborative editing of its written content. You don’t have to be an expert in computer coding or even the specific topic at hand before you are given complete expressive license to create and to edit the matter of such a site. The only expertise that is needed to contribute is the ability to think somewhat coherently and to express oneself through typed communication.

I believe we are living in a time that has taken this type of editable approach to theology. In this anti-authoritative, individualistic society, it is socially intolerant to be religiously intolerant. The culture teaches that what’s good for you is good for you but not necessarily me. What I believe about my beliefs has absolutely no jurisdiction upon your own. The only unforgivable sin is holding to a worldview with such conviction that you feel inclined to share it with another. We are trained to allow someone to continue operating in perilous ignorance over warning them to any potential impending danger. In our society, we all believe something very antithetical from one another, and yet, somehow each of us is supposedly correct.

In lieu of divine revelation, we have sought out sideways collaboration. Instead of learning from the expert, we effortlessly become the expert. We have traded truths etched in stone by the finger of the Almighty God for erasable opinions jotted down on disposable coffee shop napkins.

Our culture worships the Wiki God. We want ever so desperately to serve a deity whom we have the freedom and capability to edit. We cut out what we dislike about God. We copy a belief from another

religion and paste it over into our own. This syncretistic approach places God upon a theological buffet in which we pick and choose those delicacies that we enjoy and pass over the dishes upon which we would rather not chew.

Voltaire said it this way: “In the beginning, God created man in his own image, and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since.” I cannot disagree with him. We were made to be like God and not the other way around, yet we filter truth as soon as it conflicts with our preferences. When Scripture teaches an attribute of God that doesn’t settle nicely into our neat, tidy theological cages that we have assembled, we resort to tossing out those doctrines altogether. “I just don’t think God is like that” could be the theological slogan for our culture.

As gently as I can say this, please process this truth:

It doesn’t matter what you or I think about God. It matters what God thinks about God.

We must submit to the ultimate authority on such a significant matter and never frivolously choose to accept the societal flavor-of-the-month theology. If we plant our feet deep in our independent world-view stances, unwilling to change even when the truth is undeniably revealed, we will never reach a satisfying conclusion as individuals or as a culture. If we espouse beliefs based upon consensus, we will throw biblical doctrine overboard ever so eagerly and find ourselves unaware that we have entered far more dangerous waters. We will voyage at what seems to be a quicker, unhindered pace until we run ashore to our utter demise realizing far too late that the anchor that we thought was our captivity was instead our only salvation.

Truth does not hold us back. Truth keeps us up. If we pursue a biblical theology, we might be alarmed at how far off we are from God’s characterizations of himself. The more we come to know about him, we may be shocked to realize how different he is from us. The psalmist declared God’s position by stating, “You thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you” (Ps. 50:21). Have we been found guilty for assuming that God is position-

ally identifiable with us? Our opinions want to dictate that God should be qualitatively relatable, but we honestly do not want to experience the ramifications of living in a world governed by a God who was tailored by us. Our edited version of God would run this world into the ground because he would look too much like us.

ABSOLUTELY NO ABSOLUTES?

Nowadays, when one begins to use such dirty words such as “truth,” the crowds begin to exclaim from the streets, “There is no absolute truth!” Well, is that statement absolutely true? “All truth is relative!” Apparently, all truths are relative except when it comes to that specific phrase. “That might be true for you but not for me.” Can I say that about your statement? “You ought not to challenge someone else’s beliefs” is, in reality, a challenge of someone’s belief.

Postmodernism, also referred to as relativism, is the notion that there is no absolute truth. What’s true for one does not mean it has to be necessarily true for another. Developed by the desire to see unity among humanity’s search for truth, postmodernism has attempted to silence exclusivist religions from maintaining vital doctrinal stances. Those who hold this worldview believe that the only absolute truth allowed is when it pertains to their inclusive beliefs. Not only is this thinking religiously offensive but it is rationally absurd.

No matter how hard we try to put the theological backspace within everyone’s reach, we must quickly acknowledge the frivolous nature of such an attempt. Allowing everyone to come up with their unique version of God does not help us come closer to understanding God. What appears as valiant efforts to know God are actually devious attempts to dethrone God. Unadulterated truth must be pursued and never neglected for something inherently lesser.

Oftentimes, in the quest for such a noble purpose, we substitute God’s eternal truth for our temporal opinion. We can see the goal up ahead in the distance, but it honestly isn’t the destination at which we thought we would arrive. Jaded by scratching the surface of such a startling discovery, we would rather elect a new leader and draft a

new constitution. In our pride, we believe that if we can just recast the lead part, then we can rewrite the script and create a more satisfactory final presentation.

In the Bible, the devil is depicted as a fallen angel (2 Pet. 2:4) who tried that exact thing. Consumed by pride (Ezek. 28:17), he wanted to take God's throne for himself (Isa. 14:13). He is known for having the audacity of questioning and even challenging God's methods (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5). When he tempted the first couple of the Bible, he deceived them by playing to a desire shared with him – to know what God knows (Gen. 3:5). If they know what God knows, they don't have to rely on him anymore for this coveted knowledge. More than merely the apprehension of information, they wanted to craft the very definition of knowledge. They wanted the authority to discern what was right and what was wrong. If they could obtain this power, they would pridefully wield the ability to take God's place. They can redraft the sacred textbook and procure a desired state of fluid theology.

Adam and Eve chose to believe a lie over the truth. The falsity was more palatable. The devil's deceit was indeed more convenient. This couple preferred a deity of their own making versus the Maker himself. They tried to rewrite what he said and fundamentally remake who he is. They wanted to replace God.

This line of thinking did not dissipate with Eden's eviction. The desire to make God play by our ever-changing rules still lures us today. We throw out the truth and replace it with our opinions. Our culture is currently experiencing moral anarchy because we have attempted to remove the possibility of divine authority.

Our subconscious reveals our double-standards concerning doctrine. We don't want to be told what to believe, by God or anyone else, but we think that our beliefs should be eagerly accepted and celebrated by all. How can we coexist in a world when our opinions concerning God are so vast in scope?

The campaign to coexist religiously urges people to avoid any sense of staunch doctrinal loyalty. The problem is that many religions do call for unwavering allegiance. While I am the first to admit that many of

history's darkest moments came under the influence of those thinking they were doing God's work, we cannot throw out religious devotion due to some extremists' religious distortion.

Truth can never be determined by a vote or a committee. The essence of truth makes its very nature absolute. Truth must also be timeless and universal. Any doctrine worth believing must be able to be regarded as true by any person in any location at any time, or else it is simply not the truth. If one belief is acceptable for you but not for me, it is a blatant falsehood. One or both of us is undoubtedly incorrect.

If I think God is pleased with our society and you think he is disgusted, can we both be correct? If I am a staunch believer that God intervenes throughout history and you believe that he is the ancient watchmaker who set the cogs and wheels in motion but then turned it loose to let it be, can we be talking about the same God? If I think God empathizes with my greatest sorrow and you think he is too lofty to depress himself with whiners like me, don't you see that at least one of us is terribly, terribly wrong?

This conflict complicates our discovery for the answer to the question concerning the character of God. It reveals the fact that if we rely on each other's opinions concerning the divine, we only possess mere personal sentiments with which to disagree. Opinions devoid of any apparent authority will continue to enable religious conflicts that have plagued history.

A.W. Tozer was a lofty theologian and passionate pastor of the twentieth century. In his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, he presented a thesis statement that signifies the importance of addressing this issue. He wrote:

“What comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you.”

On the first read, that statement may seem a bit dramatic, but is he on to something here? If someone thinks that God is a lightning-bolt throwing angry titan in the sky, that person will carefully calculate how he or she lives his or her life. If someone thinks God could care

less about the chaotic condition of this planet, that person will probably not seek God for help amidst growing concerns. If someone assumes that God does not exist, the only accountability that a person can have is himself or herself.

What comes to your mind when you think about God might be the most important thing about you. If Tozer is correct with the thought that our theological beliefs have the power to change every element of our lives, it is of utmost importance to make sure that our convictions are painstakingly accurate. If what comes to my mind when I think about God is the most important thing about me, then I better ensure that what comes to my mind when I think about God is actually correct.

I desperately need truth. If truth does exist, it is far superior and more enduring than my flighty opinions. What God says about God is far more dependable than what I say about God.

“WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?”

One of the stories that repeatedly has come to my mind even as I type these words is an encounter Jesus had with Peter one day. Jesus once asked Peter’s opinion concerning his own identity. At the time when Jesus asked this question to Peter, the ministry of Jesus was booming. Everywhere he went, people followed him just to see what he would do or what he would say next.

Peter had a front-row seat to it all. He remembered what it was like when Jesus turned one boy’s lunch into a satisfying feast for thousands. Not only could he remember the taste of that meal but he knew what it was like to haul the leftovers all the way home (Matt. 14:20). Peter experienced the joy and gratitude from his entire family when Jesus healed his mother-in-law from sickness. He watched with amazement as this woman who was uncharacteristically sidelined by fever and unable to enjoy her company was immediately serving the people in her home due to a single touch from Jesus (Matt. 8:14-15). Peter saw Jesus cause the blind to see, the mute to speak, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the demons to flee, and even the dead to rise.

The region was abuzz. Everyone had an opinion concerning Jesus. In one of those earth-shattering conversations prompted by Jesus, he asked his disciples concerning the public consensus regarding his own identity. The disciples began to relay information of which he was already aware. He just listened intently.

They reported, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets” (Matt. 16:14).

After giving them his full attention, he then asked a simple question that would forever change history. He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:15-18).

I was taught this account by many who emphasized that at this moment it didn't matter who Jesus was; it mattered who Jesus was to Peter. Jesus' objective truth was useless if it wasn't a subjective reality. That line of thinking is simply an unbiblical lie originating in the pit of hell. Peter didn't ace Jesus' pop quiz because his answer was personal; he aced it because he was correct.

If Peter would have said, “I have to agree with the crowds. I think you are simply another prophet,” Jesus would not have congratulated him. “Jesus, there have been a lot of talented preachers before you, and there will be many after you who can do precisely what you are doing. Don't get me wrong – you are a great guy, but that's just it – you are just a great guy and not a great God.”

With an answer like that, Jesus would not have responded in such a positive manner. He would not have praised Peter for his individualistic theory if his conclusion was incorrect. Jesus would never have built his church on a simple fisherman's flattering hypothesis. More than sentiment, Jesus was after truth.

If you study the life and teachings of Christ, you can guarantee that he would not have responded, “You know, Peter, that’s not exactly what I was hoping you would say, but who am I to make such an exclusive claim to truth? If it’s true to you, then I think that’s just great. How could I argue with such a sincere display of authentic honesty? Let’s all gather around to sing ‘Kumbaya’ and have a big, tolerant group hug.”

Jesus was never known to behave that way. Regarding truth, Jesus is gracious but not tolerant. He is too loving to allow error to continue without intervention.

Jesus built his church on the truth - not on the opinion.

Peter grasped the fact that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus was the one whom the people of God had been longing to behold. Everything in the Old Testament had connected the dots and colored in the picture of who this Messiah would be, and standing before Peter was the brilliantly vivid Jesus the Christ – the actual son of the living God. The King had come, and the Kingdom was coming! This encounter is one of the few times in the gospels that Peter nailed something without a hint of error.

Jesus responded with a play on words that you may or may not have caught at first glance. “Bar-Jonah” means son of Jonah. Jesus praised Peter for his answer and essentially said, “Simon, your earthly father didn’t reveal that to you, but your Heavenly Father did. I am going to change your name to reflect that you are a part of a different family now. Welcome to the family of God.”

How did Simon Peter get it right? Because it was accurately revealed to him by none other than God. Man doesn't discover the truth; God reveals the truth. Jesus promised to build the Church upon the stalwart rock of Peter’s confession. At that moment, Peter understood that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of truth. Peter knew it, he confessed it, and Christ vowed that his followers would build the Church not on man’s opinion but upon God’s truth.

WHEN JESUS CALLS YOU SATAN

For all the fumbling mistakes for which Peter is remembered, here is a glorious example of a moment when he was undeniably correct, and history would ultimately never be the same again. Riding on such a momentous spiritual occasion, Peter should have known the importance of exiting on a high note, but unfortunately, he opened his mouth moments later to reveal how quickly we can fall from such theological prominence. In light of Peter's confession, Jesus began to unveil some previously concealed information. His path was clearly leading him to Jerusalem, and he was confident that he would soon suffer unjustly under the hands of the authorities who would brutally murder him there. Since the disciples were now cognizant of his identity, he wanted to prepare them for what was coming his way, and he wanted them to know he would not change course just because suffering was imminent.

Still beaming from the honorary theological doctorate he had just received from none other than Jesus the Christ, Peter decided to pull the Messiah over to the side for a little constructively critical chitchat. Apparently, Jesus was confused, and Peter's glowing spiritual intellect was required to clear things up. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Matt. 16:22-23).

Jesus' suffering didn't fit well into Peter's Christological framework. This type of path is not what Peter envisioned. The cross would distort the image of whom Peter thought the Christ should be. Jesus was revealing the truth to Peter, and Peter didn't resonate with the content and, therefore, desired to change it.

God made Peter in his image, and now Peter wanted to repay the favor. He envisioned following a God who knew no suffering. The picture of the Messiah present in Peter's mind was that of the victor and

not the victim. Peter didn't like whom God was turning out to be, and so he attempted to change him.

Moments after Jesus renamed Simon as Peter, he suddenly nicknamed him Satan. Should it be to our surprise that Jesus called Peter by the name of the first one who tried to modify the identity of God? Satan endeavored to alter the personality and the activity of God, and Peter was following in his sacrilegious footsteps. Don't miss Jesus' diagnosis: Peter was not thinking about God; he was thinking about Man (Matt. 16:23). He wanted God to be more like him.

So do we. When we begin to discover that God is not like whom we thought he should be, we desperately want him to adjust to a mirroring type of expectations. Even if our thought processes stem from a desire to assist God in the public relations department, those efforts are in vain. Jesus interprets such blatant endeavors as mutiny. Venturing to improve God is downright satanic, and he will vehemently oppose any such efforts.

If you're going to stay clear of Jesus calling you devilish monikers, then avoid any attempts at altering his identity. Stop trying to change God and learn to embrace God. No matter how hard we try to revere the Wiki God, this deity is virtually impossible to grasp. The characteristics have changed yet again by the time we finish reading the last draft. If we attempt to recreate the Uncreated One in our image, we will find ourselves worshipping ourselves before too long.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

In the following pages, I want to address some misguided thinking. While worldly theology is present in our culture, weak theology is often present within our churches. Instead of editing who God is to suit my fancy or your expectations, I am going to apply to a higher authority than even you and me. I am going to utilize Scripture to help illuminate us concerning what God thinks about himself.

In each chapter, I will begin by presenting a common misconception of who God is. Specific recurring themes seem to invade our theolo-

gies. After describing these dangerous wiki submissions, I pray that through scriptural teaching, God will help to countermeasure our misunderstandings. We will arrive at what theologians call the biblical attributes of God. The attributes are specific characteristics taught in the Bible that help us understand the character and conduct of God. As we look at themes throughout Scripture that traces his heart and his hand, we will experience a fuller understanding of who he is.

At the end of this offering, you hopefully won't be taking my word for it. My remarks are by far the most dispensable content within these pages. I want to present you with what the Bible teaches concerning theology, and you will have to wrestle with its claims. I have. There are specific attributes that are hard for me to accept because I have found out that God is not like me. He is utterly other than me. Within the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), we find that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are worshiped and revered. While God is reliable, he is rarely predictable. He doesn't always operate the way we think he should. At every stage within the redemptive narrative, God's reveals his character more fully. With each stroke of inspired revelation, we behold a more glorious and somewhat surprising picture of who he really is.

In many theological studies, scholars will divide God's attributes into a list of those which are communicable and incommunicable. Communicable attributes are those which he "shares" with humanity. God is love. We also have the capacity to love, so, therefore, the attribute of love is communicable.

Incommunicable attributes are those that only God can possess. God is omniscient which means he knows absolutely everything. Since we do not know everything, this attribute of omniscience is incommunicable.

Due to God's otherness, I have to disagree with this commonly held distinction between the two categories. God's all-knowing ability compared to my scope of limited knowledge is just as vast in differentiation as is his commitment to unwavering, unconditional love as compared to my expressions of frivolous, conditional love. Compared

to God, all of his attributes are incommunicable when positioned side by side with the quality of one like me.

God is entirely set apart from me. He is not only holy, but he is holy, holy, holy. To accept God as-is as portrayed in Scripture is a challenge to my head but a delight to my soul.

When God's descriptions of God's character within God's Word confronts our claims to individualistic theorizations, we are each forced to respond. What will we do with this claim to truth? Will we accept God's Word or attempt to make it fit our agenda? I had to choose and so will you. You will decide to follow God the Maker or the god you make. Each of us will elect to marvel at the Grand Designer or esteem our grand design. I implore you to engage yourself with the biblical text concerning the attributes of God and allow its truth to remedy what theological infections are possibly poisoning your soul.

I don't want your version of God. You don't need my version of God. We just desperately need God.

ATTRIBUTES REVIEW

Incorrect Perception: *God is editable.*

Correct Belief: *God is God without our permission.*

Focal Verse: *These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you (Ps. 50:21).*

Implication: *God's version of himself is superior to your version of him.*

FURTHER STUDY

What specific thought from this chapter challenged you?

Meditate on Psalm 115. Write out any phrases from this psalm that get your attention.

“Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases” (Ps. 115:3). List some specific rights that God has.

CORRECTIVE THEOLOGY

Why is it irrational to believe that God should allow all people to think whatever they want to about him?

Is there an area about God in which you honestly desire to change?
What is it?

Why is God’s version of himself always superior to our versions?

CHAPTER 2: THE NEEDY GOD

Many people express allegiance to the Needy God. In all honesty, they show obeisance to him because they are worried about what will happen to him if they fail to oblige. Without mankind's existence, God's presence seemingly lacks a clear purpose. It is difficult to envision what he even did before we arrived on the scene. In fact, the reality of our existence centers around addressing God's supposed neediness. God was apparently lonely, but ever since he created us, we have graciously alleviated his solitudinous sorrow.

I first learned about the Needy God from well-intended spiritual mentors. In an effort to draw me near to God, they depicted him as destitute. They explained the reason why loved ones died is that God must have needed them in heaven for some definitive reason. Many of these leaders would teach me that God wanted to do certain things in my life but was unable because I was unwilling. They explained that if I really expected God to do something in this world, he needs my money, resources, and volunteer hours to get the job done. With so many responsibilities, he must be relieved that he created me to help him out.

It even seemed as if God's emotional state was contingent upon my regular availability for him. At an early age, I was taught regularly concerning the necessity of having a daily quiet time in which I would commit to reading my Bible and praying to him. To ensure that I didn't cancel that appointment, I was taught that God's emotional wholeness and my daily obedience were intrinsically linked. "How do you think God feels when none of his children even want to spend time with him? If you don't read your Bible and pray in the morning,

God is left abandoned in heaven wondering why you don't care anything about him. After all he has done for you, how do you think that makes him feel?"

Guilt is a reasonably potent motivator for me. When I envisioned God as a senile, old man stranded in the nursing home with no recent visitors, I felt a legitimate burden to spend time with him. If I neglected that time, he might become depressed or lonely, and how then would the world continue to orbit within the cosmos? If God is that needy, the state of the world is instead dependent upon us. I was exhorted at an early age that I better never let God down. The only way I can let God down is if I was holding him up in the first place.

God is not needy. God is independent.

THE INDEPENDENCE OF GOD

The attribute of God's independence is of extreme importance. Sometimes this attribute is described as God's self-existence. Others will use the term, "aseity," which means one's existence can only originate from oneself. Nothing outside of the being can take the credit for that ultimate existence.

The concept is simple to communicate but challenging to grasp: God is without origin. He is the uncreated Creator. He is the causeless cause. Nothing existed before God, and God needs absolutely nothing to exist in order to prove his divine nature. The Creator does not require anything from the creation. In order to be God, he must be unequivocally absent of need. For if he needs something, that reveals him to be incomplete. God cannot be deficient.

As the Apostle Paul visited Athens, he encountered the numerous statues venerating the plentiful gods. As he stared down men who were worshipping the objects of their own making, he felt compelled to confront their error. "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, *as though he needed anything*, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and

everything” (Acts 17:24-25). Paul showed the hopelessness of any man’s religious devotion if given to a deity created by man. Anyone who has to make his or her own god (Ps. 115:4) will become like that god one day (Ps. 115:8).

Paul did not follow the Needy God. He scoffed at the notion. When Paul commented, "as though he needed anything" (Acts 17:25), he was elevating the people’s perception of the one true God. He revealed the pitiful nature of having to fabricate anything for a deity. If a god requires a man to form him, that god’s resiliency must be severely compromised. The ability to identify as God assumes complete and utter independence.

We cannot create anything for the Creator. Paul believed in the one who needed no creation. This God defined himself. Paul’s belief in God’s independence originated from scriptural teaching. Inspired by God, these teachings were recorded by the likes of Job, Moses, Asaph, Isaiah, and others. Paul knew the Old Testament and knew it well. So, let’s start at the beginning of that book and at the beginning of this world.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Even the phrase, “in the beginning, God created,” is fundamentally an implication that God existed even before there was a beginning! Before everything began, God already was. He was not dependent upon any other thing to live. God utilized no pre-existing matter to exist. God *is* the pre-existing matter. His steps even precede when there was a world to walk upon. He actually set the planet on its very foundation (Ps. 104:5). No person was even around to help him when he settled the globe’s infrastructure (Job 38:4). Even the very heavens are the work of his hands (Ps. 102:25).

This God created every single thing in the universe (Rev. 4:11). All the diversified elements of creation find only one commonality - their Creator. In his wisdom, he was able to make all of the universe’s manifold works (Ps. 104:24). The only way to create all things is if you are before all things. The Apostle John taught that not only were all things invoked by the Godhead, but he made sure to emphasize that nothing has been made that was not caused by him (John 1:3). The

belief in one God assumes that he is the one from who are all things and for whom we all exist (1 Cor. 8:6). “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

All things were created *by* him and *for* him (Col. 1:16). He is not only the originator but the purpose as well. His existence before all things provides the essence of the stability needed for all things to hold together in him (Col. 1:17). He is known as the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:9, 13, 22). He is God from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. 90:2). As the eternal God (Gen. 21:33), he precedes every single other element in the universe. He has no end to his years (Ps. 102:27). He is the first, and he is the last (Isa. 44:6; 48:12). He is the Alpha and the Omega who lives forevermore (Rev. 1:17-18).

God has life *in* himself (John 5:26). God’s being does not originate outside of himself because it was not given to him by another. No external source provided him life or purpose for nothing outside him could ever hope to add value to him. He established every ounce of his being from within his own person.

Faith itself is dependent upon the fundamental belief in God’s independence. “And without faith, it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6). A Christian’s faith begins with a belief in God’s existence. For God to be God, his identity demands the attribute of independence. He is the ultimate subsistence. There has never been a moment when God was not, and there will never be a moment when God will not be.

When God approached Moses from within the burning bush, he called on this shepherd to lead the Israelites out of slavery. Moses would have to confront the Egyptian Pharaoh who governed as if he was a god and who also venerated countless other gods. Before Moses could accept the assignment, he at least needed the ability to namedrop some deity into the impending conversation. Pharaoh would refuse to continue such a pointless discussion if he was unsure which of the many gods Moses was citing to free the Israelites. What name should

Moses use to describe this particular God to such a pagan ruler in such a pantheonic land?

“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’” (Exod. 3:14). With other gods, a designator was required for identification. Ra was the god of the sun, Mafdet was the god of justice, and Thoth was the god of wisdom. The gods were known by a certain percentage of appropriately-asigned deified duties. Yet, when the God of the Bible chose a name, he simply stated, “I AM WHO I AM.” He is who he is. He will be who he says he will be. God is the independent, self-existent one who defines himself. To utilize a designator for this God would be futile because his existence is not dependent upon any of his works. He is God by the very proof of his own existence.

THE AWARENESS WE NEED

When studying God’s attributes, one must ask the question, “In light of this truth, how now should I think. What am I to do?” When our humanity intersects with his divinity, what damage is left from the unavoidable collision? In the case of God’s independence, this truth needs no one to impact. In fact, none of God’s attributes actually need human subjects on which to establish themselves. The sun does not need sunburned skin to prove its intensity, and neither does God need our scorched souls to prove his worth.

And yet therein lies the complexity of it all. We have seen the light. We have experienced the warmth. God possesses no responsibility to expose us to his glory and yet he does. “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him” (Ps. 8:4)? This truth should serve to give us the self-awareness that is essential for our often misguided souls. We can’t provide anything that God needs because he is entirely without need. We are impotent negotiators with him. We cannot barter with him because we have nothing of intrinsic worth to place upon the table.

When confronting the innocent sufferer Job, God asked, “Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine” (Job 41:11). If God were needy and required

something as simple as a meal, he wouldn't even ask us because all the world and its fullness belong to him (Ps. 50:12). Where would we even begin to haggle with him?

God's independence should create in us significant insignificance. God is entirely absent of need, and we are entirely devoid of any necessary caliber. God doesn't need us. Never once has God required our involvement to address one of his problems. God has never been stressed out by any situation. He has never frantically paced the halls of heaven gathering an angelic poll on what to do or how to do it. The Lord of hosts has never once attempted to recruit and remained anxious about the results. God may appreciate our efforts, but he has never once relied upon our efforts. Instead of allowing that truth to discourage you, it should solidify you.

God doesn't need you, but he wants you.

Take Esther for example. She was a fair damsel who caught the eye of a pagan king. He had just rid himself of his previous obstinate wife (Esth. 2:1) and was holding a beauty contest to determine his next lucky yet endangered partner (Esth. 2:2). As an exiled Jewish woman living in an idolatrous land, she had to play it safe regarding her people and her religion. Even as Esther became his queen, she was acutely aware of the possible peril if she upset the dynamics in her new family and how it could impact her kinsmen who were spread throughout the kingdom.

She played it safe until her Uncle Mordecai made known to her a plot to kill all the Jewish people (Esth. 4:1). Many people recount his speech and explain that Esther came to the kingdom for "such a time as this." Since she had this position and had the power to stop this massacre, she seemed to be the savior of the people. It was evident that her placement was providential. If it weren't for Esther, what would the people have done?

If you look at the entire phrase, you see exactly what the people would have done. Nothing. They would have done absolutely zilch. They would have anticipated the Independent God to do what only he

could do. How could they envision putting their trust in a mere person? Mordecai spells it out clearly. “For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise from the Jews from *another place*, but you and your father’s house will perish. And *who knows* whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esth. 4:14).

Did you catch it? Esther wasn’t the savior. God wasn’t dependent upon her. If she failed to play her role, someone else would step in and take over. Relief and deliverance would come from the Jews from any other potential candidate that God saw fit. Why? Because God planned to keep the Jews alive, and no person was critical enough to jeopardize his foreordained outcome. He was going to bless all the nations of the world through this people (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 49:6), and God’s purposes could not and would not be thwarted (Isa. 14:27; Job 42:2). The Israelites had no danger of perishing due to the promised one who was coming. God’s plan would go forward with or without Esther. Her position near a temporal throne had been installed by the one on the eternal throne. He was not short on options if she failed to do what she had been called to do.

God didn’t need Esther, but he wanted Esther. In all honesty, I think there is more beauty in that truth than in the alternative. If God needed me or anyone else, he immediately ceases to be God and fear would instantaneously arrest my soul. But to grasp that God is not dependent upon any of us yet chooses to use us is a humbling truth of which I pray I never grow weary of rehearsing in my mind. God doesn’t need me, but he wants me. God isn’t dependent upon me, but he is invested in me. God isn’t lacking, yet he is still inviting. He doesn’t need my skills for the task at hand, but he would like me to follow him to work anyway.

God is not needy. He is not dependent. The universe will continue the previously planned operational schedule with or without any of us. We can join him on the frontlines or watch him from the nosebleeds. He isn’t anxious as he awaits our willingness to be involved. And yet, we are invited. Oh, what glorious wonder! God’s invitation never comes out of desperation. He is independent, yet he wants to include us. The fact that God is devoid of need and yet includes us anyway should cause us to stand in awe.

INDEPENDENCE REVIEW

Incorrect Perception: *God is needy.*

Correct Attribute: *God is independent.*

Definition: *The independence of God means that he is entirely without need.*

Focal Verse: *Nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything (Acts 17:25).*

Implication: *God doesn't need you, but he wants you.*

FURTHER STUDY

What specific thought from this chapter encouraged you to think differently?

Meditate on Psalm 50:7-15. Write out any phrases from this passage that get your attention.

What does this passage teach us regarding what we can give to God and what we cannot give to God?

CORRECTIVE THEOLOGY

How does God's independence challenge popular beliefs within religious circles?

How does this attribute challenge your personal theology?

If you were truly to believe in God's independence, how would it specifically change you today?

CHAPTER LISTING

The chapter titles reveal a common miscalculation of who God is. The information past the title is the biblical attribute discussed in that particular chapter.

1. **The Edible God** – Intro
2. **The Needy God** – The Independence of God
3. **The Man Upstairs God** – The Transcendence of God
4. **The Video Screen God** – The Immanence of God
5. **The Geriatric God** – The Eternality of God
6. **The Upgraded God** – The Immutability of God
7. **The Little Engine That Could God** – The Omnipotence of God
8. **The Overbooked God** – The Omnipresence of God
9. **The Undergraduate God** – The Omniscience of God
10. **The Pollster God** – The Wisdom of God
11. **The Permission-Seeking God** – The Sovereignty of God
12. **The Unreliable God** – The Faithfulness of God
13. **The Grade on a Curve God** – The Holiness of God
14. **The Shady Past God** – The Righteousness of God
15. **The Pushover God** – The Justice of God
16. **The Thunderbolt God** – The Mercy of God
17. **The Fuddy-Duddy God** – The Goodness of God
18. **The Talent Judge God** – The Love of God
19. **The Chutes and Ladders God** – The Grace of God
20. **The Buffet God** – Conclusion

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