

Essence of God 3 – God's Self-Existence/ Independence

Genesis 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

When we open the Bible, the very first verse tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. And there is a massive, mind-boggling assumption in that verse: God was already there. The little child asks, "Who made the moon?"

And we say, "God did."

"Who made the stars?"

We say, "God did."

"Who made the sun?"

"God did?"

"And who made God?" And there we are confronted with what the Bible does not attempt to prove but in fact assumes from Genesis to Revelation: God Exists.

Hebrews 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

I. God is Self-Existent

And if God existed before anything else, that means He is self-existent. So we come to a third way of describing the essence of God. God is self-existent, or self-sufficient. Another way of saying it is God is completely independent. Self-existence is another way of saying, God exists entirely in Himself. He owes His existence to nothing else. He simply is.

Everything we know of has a cause. All things are caused. And everything that caused something else, was itself caused by something before it. And so you go back and back and back, until eventually you reach God. God is uncaused. He is not self-caused. He did not bring Himself into existence. He is uncaused. No one made Him or brought him into existence. It is His nature, it is His essence to exist. That's what it means to be God: it means to exist. It means to exist without ever having been caused by anything else. In fact, that is how He introduced Himself to Israel and to Egypt:

Exodus 3:13-15 *Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " ¹⁵ Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.'*

I AM THAT I AM, is one of the simplest and yet most profound statements in human language. God is saying, I exist because I exist. I am alive because of Myself. I will be because I will be Alive.

Now step back and ask yourself, who else can say that, and be truthful? Who can say, I am, because of me"? Who can say, "I live because of my own life that I have always had?" The one man who said it, was almost killed on the spot for saying it:

John 8:57-59 *Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." ⁵⁹ Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.*

Every human being must admit that he or she owes his existence to something outside of himself or herself.

Our life is derived from other living beings. You are alive because two other living beings, your mother and father, brought you into being. God allowed 23 chromosomes to unite with 23 chromosomes, and the already living cells of the two people united. That became your life. But if

two others with life hadn't brought you into being, you wouldn't be here. Your life is derived. It is derived from your parents. They in turn derived their life from four other people. So we can go back until Adam.

But God did not derive life from anyone. He did not have anyone before Him that caused Him to be. His is the only life which is completely independent.

John 5:26 *For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,*

John 1:1-5 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

John 1:9-10 *That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.*

When you think of life, God is the source and Being of all Life. Independent, Self-Existent Life is the essence of God. All other life is lesser in being, because all other life, from the archangel down to the single-cell organism had a beginning, and gained its life from outside itself. Not so with God. God has always existed in Himself. No one had to start Him. Before the universe existed, God existed forever in the past, enjoying Himself and loving Himself.

John 17:5 *"And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

John 17:24 ²⁴ *"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*

Now, if God alone is the I AM, and no creature can say that of itself, what do we call it when a creature asserts independence? Because, of course, you realise that independence in the absolute sense is self-existence. If a human being or an angel claims to be completely and wholly independent of all things, that human or that angel is saying "I AM THAT I AM".

Do you realise that was the substance of the very first sin? When Satan was still a wise, good and holy angel, he lived with God at the centre of his being. He worshipped Yahweh. He delighted in the truth that God alone is the I AM. But at some point, because of his beauty and his wisdom, he began to speculate whether or not he could be a being with no other ground or cause but himself. He stated things like:

Isaiah 14:13-14 *For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'*

When Satan tempted Eve, what was the main thrust of his temptation? If you eat this, you will be gods. You will be independent beings, knowing and deciding good and evil for yourselves. You will not be under God anymore. You will be equal with God.

All sin at its root is a denial of God's right to be God. It is a usurping of His place of absolute self-existence, and a refusal to take our place of humility. At the root of every sin are the words "I AM THAT I AM".

Do you know the root of obedience and humility? It is found in Paul's words in I Cor 15

1 Corinthians 15:10 *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

Not only is your life derived from someone else, you must continually take things in to remain

alive. You must take in a certain amount of food every day to stay alive. You must take in enough fluids to sustain your life. You need to take in oxygen several times a minute to stay alive. We are very dependent creatures. Take away our food, water, oxygen or even mild enough air temperature, and our lives end. In other words, you are not self-sufficient. You need things all the time to keep your being going. And in fact, there will come a time when even though you have continued to eat and drink and breathe, your body will wind down and stop functioning.

But this is not God's existence. To be self-existent is to be self-sufficient. If He needed nothing to exist, He needs nothing to exist. The idea of need, when it comes to God, is completely foreign. Consider some Scriptures:

Romans 11:34-36 *For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" ³⁶ ¶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

God has never been taught: no one has ever been His counselor. God has never owed anyone anything. That's because anything anyone can give Him came from Him in the first place.

Job 35:7 *If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what does He receive from your hand?*

Isaiah 40:13-18 *Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has taught Him? ¹⁴ With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, And taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, And showed Him the way of understanding? ¹⁵ Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, And are counted as the small dust on the scales; Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. ¹⁶ And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, Nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. ¹⁷ All nations before Him are as nothing, And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless. ¹⁸ To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?*

The whole of creation may as well be a drop in the bucket, less than nothing. The universe does not meet a need in God. God did not create the universe because He was lonely, or aimless or needing worship. God created the universe, best we can tell, because He knew it would be more delightful to share His glory with created beings than to not do so. But creation is not a form of sustenance to God.

What does that mean in terms of how we approach God?

Well, we must remember that our service or obedience can never benefit Him.

We are not meeting a need in God, and therefore, nothing that we do is a kind of payment or swap or bartering or earning. You can only earn or barter or purchase or merit when you do something for someone else who needs it. Businessmen need labour. Homeowners need maintenance. Generals need soldiers. Governments need taxes. But God is not like that. God needs nothing. And anything you do for Him, is something he has supplied. Everything you do to Him is something He has permitted. When a child makes breakfast for Mom and Dad, she does so in the house that Dad paid for, in the oven with the instruments that Mom bought, using the food Mom bought served on the plates Mom bought.

How quickly we can slip into either the 'poor God' or the 'hungry God' mindset.

The 'poor God' mindset says, look at poor God. He made this world but it is now such a mess. It makes Him so sad. He wishes that it could be different, but it is up to us to make Him happy or even cheer Him up with our obedience; it is up to us to evangelise and send missionaries without which God's plan will be thwarted, and God will be even more miserable. And so, the 'poor God' mindset paints a picture of heaven as a really messy office with a really stressed-out God, with a lot of 'Help-wanted' signs outside the building.

That's not the God of the Bible.

Acts 17:22-25 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; ²³ "for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: ²⁴ "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ "Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

The word *worshipped* in verse 25 translates the Greek word *therepeuo*. What English word does that remind you of? Therapy. The original word meant to heal, restore, serve. God is not restored or cured or made better by us. He made everything. He is completely and happily unbounded, unlimited, unconstrained and without frustration.

The other syndrome is the 'hungry God' syndrome. Here God is like a man who is approaching dinner-time and his stomach is beginning to growl. He is becoming edgy and irritable. And so the hungry God mindset paints God as a somewhat edgy, somewhat frustrated God who is ever hungry. He is hungry for our obedience, for our service, for our sacrifice. If we give God what He wants, then we will make Him happier – for a time. After a while, He will no doubt get hungry again, and we must keep feeding Him obedience and service.

Psalm 50:7-13 Hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; I am God, your God! ⁸ I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices Or your burnt offerings, Which are continually before Me. ⁹ I will not take a bull from your house, Nor goats out of your folds. ¹⁰ For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine. ¹² "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness. ¹³ Will I eat the flesh of bulls, Or drink the blood of goats?

God says, your service does not benefit Me, as if I were needy. And if it were possible for Me to feel a need, I own everything, and don't need you to find Me the food. But whatever you do to and for God is supplied by Him.

What kind of Christians are Christians who serve the poor God or the hungry God? They are usually quite unhappy themselves. Because their god is unhappy! All the time! Not only is He unhappy, He is impossible to please. Probably the primary affections that are evoked if you view God like this are guilt, anxiety, and agitation.

The truth that God is self-existent and self-sufficient is an incredibly relieving doctrine to the hard-pressed legalist. My God is not dependent on Me. He is not terminally frustrated.

Psalm 115:3 But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.

If you never faced frustration, limitation, disappointment, surprises, or any other kind of constricting of your plans and desires, would you be a happy or an unhappy being? God is the happiest, and most supremely delighted Being in the universe. He does what He pleases because He is completely independent.

God does not need us. Taken by itself that might make us think that God does not care about us, that we are uninteresting to Him, and He hardly thinks of us at all. But that wouldn't be true.

Here is the whole truth: the completely independent God of heaven does not need our worship, but He delights in it. There is nothing you can do that can add to God, benefit Him or meet a need in Him. Yet He has made the universe in such a way that it can glorify Him and bring Him joy. In His perfect freedom and independence, He has chosen to include your worship as a part of His existence. He has chosen to make them important. In one sense, He has chosen to make them necessary. He could just as soon choose to make them unnecessary, but lovingly, He desires to fellowship with us and make our love and service and obedience a part of His existence.

So how do we respond to a God like this?

We realise in Him we live and move and have our Being. We do not sustain Him, He sustains us.

We are not the I AM. He does not revolve around us; we revolve around Him. Yet all we do for Him is not to feed Him or help Him. We return to Him what is His with loving hearts. When we do that, we delight His already joyful heart.

Jesus, Thou Joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of life, Thou Light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.