

Omnipotence – Infinite in Power

The word “omnipotence” is formed from two Latin words: “omni” meaning “all,” and “potens,” meaning “powerful.” Thus, “omnipotent” means “all-powerful.” This word is commonly used to describe God as infinite in power, by which is meant that He is able to do whatever He decides to do. Or, to put it another way, God is always able to do all of His will.

This is different than saying that “God can do anything,” because there are things that God cannot do because He will not do them. That is, since God is infinite in His unity, and infinite in His self-determination, He cannot act contrary to His own character. For example, God cannot lie (Num 23:19; Tit 1:2; Heb 6:18). Likewise, James states: “God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone” (James 1:13). Thus, God cannot do anything or act in any way that is inconsistent with any of His attributes. This is why we define God’s omnipotence as His ability to do “all of His holy will.”

This all-powerful characteristic of God is found repeatedly in the Scriptures:

Who is the King of glory? Adonai strong and mighty, Adonai mighty in battle. (Ps 24:8)

Is anything too difficult for Adonai? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” (Gen 18:14)

Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You, (Jer 32:17)

Behold, I am Adonai, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?” (Jer 32:27)

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, (Eph 3:20)

For nothing will be impossible with God. (Luke 1:37)

And looking at them Yeshua said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matt 19:26)

Closely related to God’s omnipotence is His sovereignty, meaning that He exercises His supreme power by ruling as king over His creation. Because He is able to do all that He wills to do, and because He wills to be the only ultimate sovereign or king over the universe, this is a reality. Having repented of his rebellion against God, Nebuchadnezer rightly confessed:

I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’ (Dan 4:34–35)

This means that God is the ultimate or greatest of Kings, for He rules all and in His sovereign power, controls, sustains, and ordains all. Even though mankind as a whole does not recognize His omnipotence and supreme sovereignty, there is coming a day when all will confess this truth:

And Adonai will be king over all the earth; in that day Adonai will be the *only* one, and His name the *only* one. (Zech 14:9)

This prophecy of Zechariah means that in the final day, the day when God restores Israel to the Land, subdues their enemies, and reinstates worship at the Temple, then all will recognize that He is king over all the earth, that He is the only true God, and that there is none other like Him, i.e., His “name” (personhood) is entirely unique, for no being exists that shares the infinite measure of His being.

We may also consider the attribute of *Freedom* within the context of His omnipotence and sovereignty. For when we say that God is able to do all that He wills, we must also correlate the fact that His will is entirely free from restraints or forces outside of Himself. Or to put it another way: God does whatever He pleases. As the Psalmist writes:

Not to us, Adonai, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth. Why should the nations say, “Where, now, is their God?” But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. (Ps 115:1–3)

No one can dictate to God what He must do nor is there any authority outside of or above God to whom or to which He must submit. Thus, for instance, God is not constrained by the laws of physics extant within the created universe, nor is He subject to any other powers, whether mortal or supernatural, that exist in the universe.

Because God is eternally and infinitely free, we should be content to realize that the ultimate answer to the question of why God does this or does that is simply that He has willed to do so. Indeed, the whole “problem of evil” (which has been the focus of theological and philosophical debates from earliest times) is really asking the question why God would create a physical universe, including mankind, in the first place? Surely He had no need for such a creation since He is infinite in all of His being. In the end, the best answer that we can give is that He created the universe because in His totally free will, He decided to do so. Thus, His purposes ultimately return to Himself, which is why all things will, in the final analysis, accrue to His glory:

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:36)

Holy – Infinite in Holiness

It is easy to understand that omnipotence, if existing apart from the attribute of holiness, might not demand one’s praise. For if infinite power were not in every way in concert with infinite holiness, that power could be used for evil. Thus, “infinite holiness, even more than infinite knowledge or infinite power, is the object of reverence.”¹

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1.413.

When we speak of God as infinite in holiness, we are talking about His moral excellence. For instance, in 1Sam 2:2 we read:

There is no one holy like Adonai, indeed, there is no one besides You,
Nor is there any rock like our God.

In this we affirm that God alone is infinite in holiness and therefore the only One who is “absolutely pure and free from all limitation in His moral perfection.”¹ That this is one of God’s attributes is clear from the fact that holiness is part of His Name, for He reveals Himself in the Scriptures as “the Holy One of Israel” (קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל, *q^edosh Yisra’eil*).²

The Hebrew noun קְדוֹשׁ, *q^edosh*, is most often used in connection with the Tabernacle or Temple and the sacred services performed there. Thus, the verb (which is denominative, i.e., derived from the noun) “connotes the state of that which belongs to the sphere of the sacred.”³ Yet its primary emphasis is that what is *q^edosh* is free from any admixture with that which is “common” (לֵךְ, *chol*). Thus,

Holiness, on the one hand, implies entire freedom from moral evil; and, upon the other, absolute moral perfection. Freedom from impurity is the primary idea of the word. To sanctify is to cleanse; to be holy, is to be clean.⁴

This is the primary lesson learned from the purity laws of the Torah, for since the Tabernacle/Temple was a place in which the glory of God resided (the *Shekinah*), the “place” must be without mixture of the “unholy.” To teach this aspect of holiness, i.e., that it means “freedom from impurity,” no one was allowed into the Tabernacle or Temple who was ritually unclean. Metaphorically, if impurity were to envelope the Tabernacle or Temple, this would threaten the infinite purity of God Himself, and thus He would be required to extinguish that which was unclean. Thus, the boundaries of the Tabernacle and Temples were for the safeguarding of those who were ritually unclean. It is in this sense that God in His infinite holiness is considered a consuming fire, for fire purifies even substances that are solid, such as metals.

And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of Adonai was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. (Ex 24:17)

For Adonai your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. (Deut 4:24)

Sinners in Zion are terrified; Trembling has seized the godless. “Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?” (Is 33:14)

Since God is infinitely holy, the place of His dwelling must also be holy:

Who may ascend into the hill of Adonai? And who may stand in His

1 Ibid.

2 2 Ki 19:22; Ps 71:22; 78:41; 89:19; Is 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11–12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14; Jer 50:29; 51:5.

3 T. McComiskey, “קדש” in *TWOT*, 2.786.

4 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1.413.

holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. (Ps 24:3–4)

Since God is holy, and since His people are to be like Him, His holiness provides a pattern to be imitated. Throughout the book of Leviticus we read “You shall be holy; for I, Adonai your God am holy” (Lev 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8). Israel is to be a “holy nation” to God (Ex 19:4–6). Thus, to be holy as God is holy means to live a life separated from evil and sin and devoted to God by serving Him and obeying His Torah.

Moreover, it is when God reveals His holiness to mankind, that we are able to see ourselves as we truly are. An example of this is Isaiah’s vision of God’s holiness recorded in chapter six of his prophecy. Here we find the word *qadosh*, “Holy,” repeated three times in a row, a literary phenomenon only found two other times in the Tanach.¹ Having viewed the holiness of God in His dwelling place, Isaiah cries out:

Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, Adonai of hosts.” (Is 6:5)

Thus, it is in the light of God’s holiness that we are able to make a proper assessment of our own sinfulness. Here, again, God Himself is seen to be the standard of holiness.

Righteousness and Justice.

Under the heading of “Holiness,” we may also consider God’s attributes of righteousness and justice. While in English we may make a distinction between righteousness and justice, in the Bible (both the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures), a single word-group encompasses both terms. In the Hebrew, this word-group is that based upon the verb צדק (tzadaq) and the cognate nouns צדקה and צדק (tzedeq and t^edaqah). In the Greek, is it the δίκαιος (*dikaios*) word-group that services both the sense of English “righteousness” and “justice.”

In regarding “righteousness” as a subset of God’s holiness, we mean that God always *acts* in accordance with what is right. That is to say, being infinite in holiness, all of His *actions* are in concert with that infinite holiness. When we speak of God’s justice, we mean that since He is infinite in holiness, He is Himself the universal and final *standard* for what is right, and that therefore His assessment and verdict regarding the actions of all other beings is always right and good.

The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He. (Deut 32:4)

The fear of Adonai is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of Adonai are true; they are righteous altogether. (Ps 19:9)

And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.” (Rev 16:7)

¹ I.e., where the exact same word and form is found three times in a row. Jer 22:29 (אָרְזָן אָרְזָן אָרְזָן); Ezek 21:27 (עֲוֹהַ עֲוֹהַ עֲוֹהַ).

If we ask ourselves what is right or what ought to be, the answer is that whatever conforms to God's moral character is right. In short, since He, and He alone, is infinite in holiness, then He is the unchanging, eternal standard for what is holy, right, and good. Moreover, given this reality, we see how foolish or illogical it is to suggest that God, in any of His actions, could be deemed "unfair" or "unrighteous." For if He is the eternal and infinite standard of what is holy, righteous, and just, then all of His actions, His thoughts, and intentions are likewise holy, righteous, and just. If we, as mortal and finite beings, come to the end of ourselves in seeking a satisfying explanation for God's actions, one that "fits" our concept of what is right, then we are best served by remembering that "He is in heaven, and we are on the earth," and that His ways and thoughts are far above us.

We learn this from the story of Job. When Job questions whether God has been righteous in His dealings with him, God answers this way:

Then Adonai said to Job, "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? ... Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified? (Job 40:2, 8)

When Job thinks to question whether God has acted in righteousness, God does not answer by giving him an explanation so that Job could understand His actions, but rather with a statement of His grandeur and power. Once Job has seen that God's actions are right because He is God, not because He is subject to some standard outside of Himself to which He must conform, Job exclaims:

Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. (Job 40:4)

Simply put, God does not need to explain His actions to Job because He is the Creator and Job is the creature. Once Job is well reminded of that, he accepts as a starting point that God is righteous and just in all of His actions.

It is the attribute of infinite justice within the being of God that stands as the foundation for His requiring propitiation in order to pardon the guilty. In this regard (as with all of His attributes), one cannot put at odds God's goodness and His justice nor can one fail to distinguish between God's benevolence and His attribute of justice. Thus, the Bible clearly teaches the necessity of God's justice being satisfied in order for Him to forgive sin.

This is seen first in the whole matter of sacrifices being offered. If God were able, acting consistently within the realm of His unified attributes, to simply pardon the sinner as an act of His infinite goodness or benevolence, one would have to conclude that there was no attribute of justice within His being. But since (as we have seen) the Scriptures are replete with the teaching that God is just and infinitely just, we must reckon with the fact that in order for God to act in accordance with His justice and yet, on the other hand, pardon the sinner, His justice must first be satisfied. The very fact that the Messiah is set forth in the Scriptures as a propitiation for sin verifies the fact. For in His death being viewed as a propitiation for sin, this presumes that it would be unjust, that is, contrary to moral rectitude, to pardon the guilty without such a propitiation. Consider the following texts:

... being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Messiah Yeshua; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; (Rom 3:24–25)

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Heb 2:17)

and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1John 2:2)

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1John 4:10)

Regarding the word “propitiation,” one should be aware of the fact that the Greek term used by Paul and John, as well as the author of Hebrews, is *ἱλαστήριον* (*hilastarion*) and its cognates (*ἱλάσκομαι*, *hilaskomai*; *ἱλάσμος*, *hilosmos*), the very same word group used in the Lxx of the Torah for the top of the ark, i.e., the “mercy seat,” very place where the blood was sprinkled by the high priest on Yom Kippur.¹ That the Apostles would refer to Yeshua by precisely the same term used by the Lxx to translate *כַּפֹּרֶת* (*kaporet*, “mercy seat; place of atonement”) is very significant, for in tying the two together, they are teaching us that Yeshua, like the mercy seat, is the very “place” where God’s justice is satisfied, where propitiation is accomplished. This further illustrates that the ultimate revelation given through the sacrificial system was to emphasize this reality, namely, that for God to pardon sinners, His justice must be satisfied. As Paul argues, if pardon for sin could have come about by any other means than through the death of Messiah, then Yeshua died in vain:

I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Torah, then Messiah died needlessly. (Gal 2:21)

This is likewise Paul’s argument in Romans, namely, that for God to justify sinners, that is, to declare sinners “not guilty,” His own justice must first be satisfied:

... [Yeshua] whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Yeshua. (Rom 3:25–26)

Note carefully what Paul says: it was necessary for Yeshua to be clearly set forth as the propitiation for sin so that all would recognize God to be righteous. Why? Because it appeared that God has “passed over the sins” of previous generations. If, in fact He had, this would render Him less than righteous, because it would mean that He lacked the attribute of justice. But, being infinitely just, God’s own justice required that payment for sin must be made

¹ Ex 25:17–22; 31:7; 35:12; 37:6, 8–9; Lev 16:2, 13–15; Num 7:89.

before sin could be forgiven. Thus, through the death of His Son, Yeshua, God remains “just” while at the same time the “Justifier” of those who, by faith, lay hold of the propitiation made in Yeshua’s blood.

This concept of God’s justice being satisfied as the essential component of His forgiving sinners is also found in the wording of Isaiah 53. For after describing the death of the Messiah, v. 11 speaks of His resurrection (in the metaphor of “seeing light”) and thus of His being satisfied:

As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see light¹ and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. (Is 53:11)

Note carefully that His “right” to justify the many is because He has borne their iniquities, that is, He has paid the price for their sins (the price being death) so that His justice is satisfied and thus, in full consistency with His infinitely holy being, He may declare “the many” to be “not guilty.”

Goodness

We may also subsume the attribute of goodness under the general heading of God’s holiness. At first it may seem difficult to show any real or significant difference between God’s holiness or His righteousness and His goodness. What goodness adds to holiness, righteousness and justice is the idea of beauty or that which is deemed worthy of approval. When we affirm that God is good we mean that all that God is and does is worthy of our approval. It is on this basis that God admonishes us to give thanks in all things, for since He is sovereign and all powerful, we may rest assured that all which comes into our life is good, that is, for God’s glory and our good:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Rom 8:28)

The Psalmist recognizes that “goodness” is one of God’s attributes by describing His Name as “good.”

I will give You thanks forever, because You have done it, and I will wait on Your name, for it is good, in the presence of Your godly ones. (Ps 52:9)

Willingly I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to Your name, Adonai, for it is good. (Ps 54:6)

This concept, that God’s Name is good, and thus goodness is an essential attribute of His being, is incorporated into the 18th Benediction of the *Shemonei Esrei*.

We are thankful to You that You are Adonai our God, and the God of our fathers for all eternity. Rock of our lives, Shield of our salvation are You from generation to generation. We give thanks to You and

1 “see light” – this is the reading of both 1QIs^a and the Lxx. Though missing in the MT, it seems warranted on the basis of the corroborative witness of Qumran and the Lxx to restore the word “light” in this verse.

recount Your praise for our lives which are committed into Your hand, and for our souls which are entrusted to You, and for Your miracles that are with us every day, and for Your wonders and Your goodness (טובותיך) at all times—evening, morning, and afternoon. You are good (הטוב) for Your compassion is never exhausted, and You are compassionate, for Your lovingkindness never ceases. Forever we have hoped in You! And for all the foregoing, blessed and exalted be Your Name, our King, constantly, for all eternity. And all the living shall thank You and praise Your Name in truth. The Almighty, our salvation and our help. Blessed are You, Adonai, “The Beneficent” is Your Name (הטוב שקרא) and to You it is fitting to give praise.

It is, therefore, a most important aspect of our faith and trust in God, that we affirm His absolute goodness, for it is when we do so that we are able to receive from His hand whatever comes into our lives, and to do so with the strength that comes from knowing that all which He does is good.

Love, Grace, and Mercy – Infinite in Love

When we consider the attribute of love as expressed in God’s self-revelation, we mean that He eternally gives Himself to others, that is, He acts for the goodness of others, meaning that it is within His very nature to bring about blessing or good for others.

Some have argued that love could not be an attribute of God since it requires “others” to exist, for love by its very definition is that which one does for someone other than themselves. It is further argued that until God created the physical universe, there were no objects which could receive His love, and therefore He could not be said “to love” in eternity past. Yet this line of argumentation is directly overturned by the very words of Yeshua Himself.

Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

Here, Yeshua states that “before the foundation of the world”¹ the Father loved Him. Here, therefore, we see that in the mystery of the Godhead, there existed a relationship of love before the universe was created.

God’s love is not determined nor attracted by any thing nor by any one outside of Himself. This means that God’s love is sovereign—He loves as a matter of His own sovereign will.

And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of Adonai before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” (Ex 33:19, cp. Rom 9:15)

In the inexplicable nature of God’s love, He has demonstrated His sovereign love through His relationship with mankind, and particularly with mankind as fallen sinners. For as in all cases, but especially in loving sinners, it is clear

1 “foundation of the world” is a set phrase describing the point in time when God created the universe. “Before the foundation of the world” thus describes eternity past. Cf. Matt 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; John 17:24; Eph 1:4; Heb 4:3; 9:26; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8; 17:8.