

FOUNDATIONS
FOR CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

THE LAW OF GOD (4): GOD



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Foundations for Christian Worldview: The Law of God (4): God
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *Foundations for Christian Worldview:*
The Law of God (4): God

The Christian worldview begins with God.

God is the most prominent subject of the books of Moses. He is the reason for all that is, and all that is finds its purpose and fulfillment in a right relationship with Him.

There is only one God, and this God consists in three Persons. He is eternal, holy, sovereign, and gracious, and it pleases Him to reveal Himself to humankind. Our worldview and our lives will only be complete to the extent that they focus on and submit to God, finding in Him our greatest satisfaction and delight.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 God is One

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” Deuteronomy 6.4

Constructing a Christian worldview

In his essay, “Christian World Views and Some Lessons of History,” Mark A. Noll wrote, “To construct Christian world views and to act for Christ in daily existence on the basis of those world views is a high calling. History shows two things about such a calling: that by God’s grace it can be done, but also that it is never an easy task.”

Constructing a Christian worldview requires full access to the revelation of God in Scripture, starting with the books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy). The worldview that begins to emerge in these books is Christ-focused, spiritual, covenantal, redemptive, comprehensive, life-giving, religious, and attainable. We may begin to construct that worldview within a framework of three facets, in which all the facets are connected to one another and equally essential for the integrity of the whole.

In the next several installments in our series *Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, we will concentrate on the first facet – the left leg of this worldview triangle – as the Law of God yields material for constructing the various aspects of this leg. This facet outlines the *vision* that gives meaning, vitality, direction, and shape to all other aspects of our worldview.

It is important to emphasize again that the worldview of God’s Law is first of all a *spiritual* worldview. All worldviews are religious, in that they share a desire to achieve the good life and follow – by faith – certain rituals or protocols designed to bind them to that vision of the good life. The Christian worldview is both *religious* and *spiritual*. It makes no sense and has no lasting power apart from continuous awareness of, focus on, and engagement with the unseen world within which everything exists. Without a clear and compelling *spiritual vision* as the first leg of our worldview triangle, nothing else claiming to represent a Christian worldview will realize the full potential of that glorious economy.

We do not apologize for this, and we do not intend by it that the Christian worldview is concerned merely with spiritual matters. It is a worldview that speaks to all of life, with reference to God and His good and perfect will as the top point of our vision. As we work to flesh out the details of our Christian worldview, to “construct” our worldview and to “act for Christ in daily existence” on the basis of that worldview, we insist that we must remain vitally connected to ultimate spiritual realities and truths, in particular, to God.

The center of our worldview

What we begin to discover in God’s Law, is God Himself. The worldview revealed in God’s Law begins in God, and is defined, sustained, and fulfilled by God. We cannot understand the worldview of God’s Law, much less expect to gain any real benefit from it, unless we focus on God as the defining feature and Presence of that worldview, and submit ourselves, soul and body, to what we know of Him. At the top of the left leg of our worldview triangle, therefore, we place God, Who gives meaning and purpose to everything else.

This is what Solomon means in the book of Ecclesiastes by living “under the heavens” rather than “under the sun.” The fact of God is *the decisive difference* between the Christian worldview and all other worldviews.

We observe, as God declared through Moses, that God is One. God is One, and the one God is the focal point and driving force of everything else in our Christian worldview.

The Christian worldview is founded on the conviction that there is only one God, the God of Scripture. No

other gods exist; all other items – real and tangible or merely supposed to exist – that take the place of God in defining the good and true life are false deities and cannot deliver the hoped-for worldview boon. Thus, it is futile and dangerous to have or to serve any other gods besides this God, or to divert our ultimate affections and best energies to any other being or creature, spiritual or material, real or imaginary, living or dead.

God is One, and within Himself He is one in purpose, will, power, being, attributes, and action. There is no division or disruption in God; He does not change, does not deceive, and cannot die. His will cannot be opposed, and it is only dangerously denied or ignored. One God only defines the nature of all truth and prescribes the way people should live who would know full and abundant life.

The God Who is One promulgates and sustains a worldview expressive of His character and will. Thus we should expect that worldview to be, like God Himself, knowable, reliable, durable, good, and characterized by integrity throughout. The more we improve our focus on and relationship with the one God – the better we *know* Him (Jn. 17.3) – the better we will understand, the more we will appreciate, and the more eagerly we will live according to the worldview first outlined in His Law.

Seek the Lord

The first requirement of the worldview outlined in God's Law is, therefore, that we should seek the Lord, to fear, obey, love, and serve Him in all things, and to keep His Law with all our soul and strength, so that all the goodness God has promised in His covenant may come to us in His way and time (Deut. 10.12, 13). God commands us to love Him with all our heart, and He warns us against not sustaining hearts committed to knowing and obeying Him (Deut. 6.4; 5.29). He alone is God, and there is no other. He alone defines what is good and true and therefore what we should most aspire to in this life.

Nothing else that we might take as our ultimate focus and aspiration, nothing that we might desire besides the one God as our highest good, can ever satisfy the longing in our souls for a life of goodness, beauty, and truth. Thus, only full and complete devotion to the one God must be the apogee of our vision of that life, so we are always desiring and living toward God in everything we do.

The Law of God, where we begin constructing our Christian worldviews, reveals above all else that God is One. He has promulgated one worldview and one way to know Him and to enjoy all the fullness of blessing He intends. So we need to explore more fully the greatness and grandeur of this one God, as He is revealed in the Law of Moses.

For reflection

1. Why do we say that the Christian worldview is both religious and spiritual? What do we mean by "spiritual"?
2. Why do we say that God is the highest point and the defining component of our Christian worldview?
3. What does it mean to love the Lord our God with all our heart? What role does the heart play in the Christian worldview?

Next steps – Transformation: Loving God with all our heart is our highest calling. But what does this mean? How can we know whether we are loving God with all our heart? Talk with a Christian friend about these questions.

2 The One God is Three

“For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day.”
Exodus 20.11

The doctrine of the Trinity

The Christian worldview drives toward God, aspires to God, orients itself by God, and derives its substance and support from God. The many believers who pursue the one Christian world – many held together as one people – are, as the image-bearers of God, created and redeemed to enact and declare His beauty, goodness, and truth in all aspects of their lives throughout the whole of creation.

The great mystery of God is that He is both One and Three. There exists in God an infinite, glorious, and eternal diversity-within-unity; and this provides a template for the people of God created on earth. The three Persons of the one God share continuously in a loving fellowship of being, communion, collaboration, and complementarity. Their fellowship serves as the blueprint for Christian living and for seeking the Kingdom and righteousness of God within the worldview outlined in the Word of God (1 Jn. 1.3).

The doctrine of the Trinity provides the starting-point, energy, and destination for Christian life, just as it does for all of Scripture. All Scripture begins in God the Father, is carried along and empowered by God the Holy Spirit, and directs our souls and lives to God through the Word of God, Jesus Christ. The doctrine of God, and of the Trinity, charts the course, supplies the power, and defines the objective for constructing and living a consistently Christian worldview. Any worldview which falls short of discovering, declaring, and demonstrating the glory of the one triune God will be something less than a Christian worldview.

In the beginning

We begin to receive glimpses of this divine Trinity as early as the opening verses of the Bible, which are also the opening verses of God’s Law. That God is One and Three was only dimly understood by the ancient Hebrews who received His Law, but the intimation of the Threeness of the one God is clear, especially in the account of His work of creation.

“In the beginning, God...” Thus begins the first book of the Law. When everything else began to be, God already was. The One God is without beginning and without end. He exists apart from, over, and throughout everything else, but without need of anything apart from Himself. He is sufficient unto Himself. Nothing hinders Him; nothing can alter or impede Him; nothing is beyond or above Him; He defines everything that is.

The Hebrew word for God is *Elohim*, a word which alludes to the exalted uniqueness and mystery of the One God, but a word which, at the same time, ends in a plural morpheme, *-im*, which is the Hebrew equivalent to the English “s” or “-es”. The one God is a plurality. From the beginning, the Law points to the plurality that exists in God.

Shortly after we are introduced to the pre-existing, world-creating God, we read, “And God said...” The one God consists of a Word, a Word which is the expression and power of the eternal Wisdom of God, a Word which issues from and is separate from God, but acts as God upon the world. That Word brought everything that exists into being. That Word spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, and called him to his mission as the redeemer of Israel.

The Word issues from God, is separate from God, and carries the authority and power of God to accomplish the will of God. God (the One) spoke (the Word). The Word is *of* God and therefore *is* God Himself (Jn. 1.1). God is God and Word, Father and Word, and that Word is the Wisdom of God (Prov. 8.12-31) and thus

God Himself.

We also read, prior to the mention of God's Word, that "the Spirit of God" hovered over the creation, brooding, as it were, like a hen on her eggs, protecting and urging the creation to life.

The Spirit of God is not the Father and is other than the Word. Yet the Spirit is of God – He partakes of God and is the same as God – and He has life-giving power (Jn. 6.63). The Spirit also has power to enliven the Word of God (1 Cor. 2.12, 13), thus revealing the Wisdom of God to His chosen creatures (cf. Num. 11.25; Ps. 147.19, 20). The Spirit of God, working with the Word of God, gave through Moses the Law of God (Deut. 9.10; cf. Lk. 11.20, Matt. 12.28), which expresses the life of God (Lev. 18.1-5) and thus provides the footprint for the Christian worldview.

The Threeness of God – one God in three Persons – is already evident at the beginning of Scripture, the beginning of God's Law; therefore, it must be the beginning and end of the worldview of those who receive the Scriptures and Jesus Christ Whom they reveal (Jn. 5.39).

God and the world

The Three-in-One God exerts Himself with intention on the creation that He has made, and He does so not only by His direct and sovereign Word (cf. Heb. 1.3), but through the beings He has ordained to bring His rule to bear on the creation (Ps. 8.5-8; Heb. 2.5-9).

In the account of the creation of Adam and Eve, we glimpse again the Threeness of the One God expressing and accomplishing His eternal will. In Genesis 1.26-28, God takes counsel within Himself and says, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness..." (emphasis added). God cannot be talking to any other beings, for example, angels, or men – male and female – who are made in the image of God alone, not the image of God and angels (Gen. 1.27).

The Three-in-One God made people in His likeness – one-image-but-diverse-expressions – and appointed them to administer His rule over the creation, that all God had made might continue to be "very good" (Gen. 1.31).

Because the Law of God says so little about the three Persons of the Godhead, but because it makes clear that such a Triune God exists, the Law points us beyond itself to subsequent revelation, for which it is a kind of cornerstone; and which will be essential in helping us to fully understand and benefit from the worldview it begins to outline.

For reflection

1. Why do we say that the doctrine of the Triune God is the beginning, power, and end of Christian worldview? What are the implications of this for your daily life?
2. Why is it important that we understand ourselves as having been made in the image and likeness of God? Meditate on 2 Corinthians 3.12-18. God is working to restore us to that image. What is our part in this process?
3. The doctrine of God is the north star of Christian worldview. Explain.

Next steps – Preparation: How much of your time in the Word is spent meditating on God (Ps. 27.4)? How can you give more time to meditating on Him?

3 The Three-in-One God is Eternal

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." 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.'" Exodus 3.14, 15

God beyond time

We're looking into the Law of God, the five books of Moses, to discern the foundations of the Biblical and Christian worldview that begin to emerge there. We are focusing on the left leg of our worldview triangle, with the worldview vision God sets forth for us in these early chapters of Scripture. In this installment, we're concentrating on the most prominent theme and presence of the Law – and of all Scripture – and that is God Himself. God is the ultimate end and objective of the Christian worldview. He is the joy and rejoicing of our heart, the lens through which we see the world, the One to Whom we devote ourselves in this world, and for Whose glory we do all that we do. God is One. He alone is God, and there is none other besides Him. All other deities, whether or not they are acknowledged as such, are false and futile. Only God is God.

And God is Three. The one God consists of three Persons: the Father, the Son or Word, and the Holy Spirit. These three Persons constitute the one God and share in a fellowship of being, communion, collaboration, and complementarity in which human beings, as the image-bearers of God, find their fullest and most satisfying life.

And God is eternal. He is without beginning, and He has no end. It is impossible for us to grasp the true nature and full significance of this. The eternity of God is and must always remain a mystery. We can approach an understanding of God as eternal by thinking of Him as existing before all things and over all things, and thus forever, both backwards and forwards. But this does not quite get at the eternity of God as He is presented in His Word.

God does not exist in time, but over and beyond time. Time is the creation of God, Who is timeless; He sees all of time, and everything that transpires in time, in one comprehensive glance, since time is little more than the spatial and temporal realization of God's eternal decrees. If there were no time, and none of the beings or events that fill time, God would still exist in a form of being that nothing else can fully share. Only God is eternal in the full sense of the word; human beings enter God's eternal life and partake of Him there, but only in a limited, albeit true, sense.

The eternity of God has tremendous significance for our Christian worldview. God understood this as He spoke to Moses from the burning bush, and He specifically sent His servant to declare His eternity to His people.

What's in a Name?

Moses was being charged with a great task, a risky task, given his past experiences in Egypt. It makes sense that he would have wanted to know what to tell the people of Israel about the God Who had commissioned him to this task. So he asked God what he should tell the people when, as would undoubtedly have been the case, they asked him, "Oh yeah? God *Who?*"

And God was happy to comply with Moses' request. The formal Name of God – which is *Yahweh* and is usually translated, *LORD* – was known during the period of the patriarchs, throughout the book of Genesis. It was known, but it was not understood. The Hebrew word, *Yahweh*, appears to derive from a form of the verb, "to be". God says that His name is "I AM". Another possible translation of what God said to Moses in verse

14 is “I WILL BE WHO I AM”, since the form of the Hebrew verb, אֶהְיֶה, can carry both meanings.

The sense of this seems to be that God always *is*. He never *was* and never *will be*. He is eternally existing as He is in Himself, as He was before the beginning of all things, and as He was known to the fathers of Israel. He is unaffected in His being or purposes by any temporal things or situations, since He works all things according to the counsel of His will, which precedes all actions and things (Eph. 1.11).

God is thus eternal and unchanging. Nothing comes before Him. Nothing that exists or comes to pass affects Who He is or what He does. He will never come to an end. His purposes will never be altered, abandoned, or overcome by any other purposes or powers because He always exists to ensure that what He has purposed shall be fulfilled.

The One-in-Three God will always *be*.

Faithful, reliable, true

The people of Israel, long captive in Egypt, must have looked back through the stories of their fathers and longed for the God of their fathers to be with them, so that they might again hear His promises, know His presence, and realize His purpose for their lives. Now Moses was being sent to tell them that, in fact, this was exactly what had always been, but was now about to become more manifestly clear.

As for the worldview which the eternal God has promulgated, beginning in His Law, we can be certain that, because He is eternal and unchanging, He will not change His mind about His will, and nothing will be able to prevent Him from realizing what He has purposed forever in this covenant and worldview.

God does not change. Nothing precedes Him in being or power, and nothing can arise without Him or above Him. He is eternal, unchanging, and ever-present with His people, to accomplish for them all that He has promised, without fail. He is therefore altogether faithful, reliable, and true to His Word.

The eternally-present God of the covenant is with His people to give them rest (Ex. 33.14). This aspect of the divine worldview, first promised in the Law, but only partially fulfilled then and throughout the Old Testament, would realize its fullest expression in the coming of Him Who is *Immanuel* – God With Us, the incarnate Word – and in the outpoured Spirit of the Three-in-One God Who spoke to Moses from the burning bush.

The God Who created time and the world, Who spoke to Moses in the bush, Who delivered His people from the mightiest empire of the day, and Who gave His Law to His people forever, is the *eternal and unchanging and unthwartable God*. And this God is the end and substance of our Biblical and Christian worldview.

For reflection

1. What do we mean when we say that God does not exist *in time*? How does this make Him altogether unique?
2. How would you explain “I AM WHO I AM” or “I WILL BE WHO I AM” to an unbelieving friend?
3. God is eternal, and He gives us eternal life. What are some differences between eternal life as we know it and eternal life as it exists in God?

Next steps – Transformation: How does the fact that God is eternal encourage you in your walk with and work for Him? Share your answer with a Christian friend.

4 The Eternal God is Holy

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'" Leviticus 19.1, 2

To be like God

The idea of "holiness" essentially involves being separated from what is "common", or what is everywhere to be found, in order to be devoted to what is not common, what is eternal, what is good. Holiness implies moral purity and perfection, uncompromising veracity and faithfulness, and a host of other spiritual virtues.

There is nothing common about God. God is One, Three- in-One, and eternal. He is *sui generis*, and in His utter uniqueness, God is holy.

God is not part of His creation. He is not contained in time or space. He is eternal in His being, attributes, purposes, and power. The heavens and the earth cannot contain Him, nor can they exist apart from Him. He does not dwell in temples or shrines made with human hands. He is altogether complete and sufficient unto Himself, wholly unique in His eternal being and attributes. He is completely separate from everything else that exists, and untainted and unaffected by the many imperfections and corruptions of the world.

He is holy. What does it mean to be holy? It means to be like God.

God's holiness and its effects

The Scriptures describe the holiness of God in various ways. God is of purer eyes than to behold evil (Hab. 1.13). It's not that He does not *see* evil; it is rather that He does not *countenance* it. He acts to overcome evil with good, either by purifying that which is evil, or by destroying it.

God is described as thrice holy: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" (Rev. 4.8). The three-fold repetition of this modifier is meant to insist on its perfection and unchangeableness. God is always holy and always will be holy.

Looking more specifically into the Law of God, we see that the holiness of God affects whatever He inhabits or wherever He appears, whether the heaven where He dwells in glory (Deut. 26.15), the earth around the burning bush (Ex. 3.5), the day He has set apart for resting in Him (Ex. 16.23), the offerings He receives (Lev. 2.3; Deut. 26.13), the place where He chooses to meet with His people (Ex. 26.34), the services of worship He requires there (Lev. 21.6; 23.2; 23.4), or the people He has redeemed to be His own possession (Ex. 19.6; Deut. 7.6; 14.2).

God is holy, and He is able to make things holy which are not holy by nature. As He sets them apart unto Himself, for His own unique purposes and to be used in His own chosen ways, things and people become holy. They partake of the holiness of God, and thus refract a measure of His holiness into the space and time they occupy.

A holy people

The people of God are redeemed unto holiness. Yet, because they are creatures of space, time, and substance, and the offspring of Adam and Eve, they are by nature *not* holy, and must devote themselves to the pursuit of holiness as the evidence of their having been redeemed by the holy God (2 Cor. 7.1). God's people must work out the requirements and manifestations of holiness within their own reality. This requires that they separate themselves *from* what is common and not holy, so that in all things they might live *unto* God. By looking to the promises of God and all His Word, the people God has called to be holy separate themselves from all unholiness and, partaking of the divine essence, increase in the holiness of the Lord (2 Pet. 1.4). Thus

the holiness of the Lord becomes manifest in the people He has chosen, redeemed, and called to Himself. It is *His* holiness they show in the world, and not a holiness of their own, of which they have none.

God is holy *unto and within Himself*. His people are to be holy *unto God and in space and time*, thus reflecting through their lives the existence, and manifesting the purposes of, the eternally holy God.

We should expect that the worldview promulgated by a holy God would be *unto* holiness, especially since God has declared that He intends His people to be holy. We should also expect that, since God is the focus and objective of our worldview, increasing in holiness – God-likeness, or Christ-likeness – would be the goal of every aspect and endeavor within the framework of our Christian worldview. Our personal lives should be holy. All our relationships should be for holiness. Our work should be holy, and all our culture. Everything we are and do should be regarded as an offering unto the Lord, and thus should partake of His holiness and manifest His glory. If this is not the case, if our goal is anything less than such holiness, then our worldview is deficient and we cannot expect the blessing of God to abide on it.

In His holiness, God is full of glory, as the people of Israel saw when He descended on the mountain, filled the Tabernacle, and appeared in their midst as a pillar of cloud and fire. The holy God is *glorious* in His holiness, bringing a presence of great spiritual power and substance into the experience of human beings, a power which issues from the larger eternal reality of the holy God.

The holiness and glory God intends for His people are *sketched* in His holy and righteous and good Law (Rom. 7.12). However, that holiness is only *fulfilled* by God's incarnate Word (Matt. 5.17-19); it is *credited* to His people by divine grace, and is *brought to fruition* in their lives through His Holy Word and Spirit (Jn. 6.63).

Only the holy God can make people holy, and holiness is what He requires of those who bear His covenant name, because He Himself is holy.

For reflection

1. How would you explain the idea of holiness to a new believer? What is involved in becoming holy as God is holy?
2. Should we really expect all aspects of our lives to increase in the holiness of the Lord? Explain.
3. The writer of Hebrews insists that without holiness, no one may expect to see the Lord (Heb. 12.14). Why is this so?

Next steps – Preparation: How conscious are you of working each day to bring holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1)? What can you do to keep the pursuit of holiness more constantly before your eyes?

5 The Holy God is Sovereign

“If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’— you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which the LORD your God brought you out. So shall the LORD your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.” Deuteronomy 7.17-19

Sovereign – of course

The books of Moses – the Law of God – unfold on the *basso continuo* of the sovereign will, power, and grace of God. He made all things, rules all things, and causes all things to serve Him. His will is not constrained by anything beyond Himself; His power is limited only by His will; and His grace issues from His will to abound to all that He has made, but especially to His people.

Throughout the book of Genesis, God demonstrates His sovereign rule over all that He has made. God works upon His creation immediately, causing the creation to obey His will at all times. The people of God in the book of Genesis seem to have taken for granted that God was sovereign and that He could do whatever He wanted with whatever He had made.

It’s interesting to consider that, in the book of Genesis, none of the primary figures, from Adam through Joseph, looks at any of the works of God as a “miracle”. Not the creation. Not the flood. Not the confusing of tongues. Not the opening of barren wombs. Not the overthrow of wicked cities. Not the ram in a bush. Not wrestling with an angel. Not the preserving of Joseph. Not the famines and deliverances. All this was just God doing what God wanted to do for His program with His people.

In fact, the Hebrew word for “wonder” or “sign” or “miracle” - *מוֹפֵת* – does not even occur in the book of Genesis. The first time we encounter this word in the Law of God is in Exodus 7.9, where it is put into the mouth of the pagan Pharaoh. What unbelievers viewed as miracles, the people of God simply took in stride as God’s sovereign work, according to His good pleasure.

The first generations of the people of God appear to have had the same view of God’s rule over the creation as Jonathan Edwards, when he wrote, “It is by the immediate influence of God upon things according to those constant methods which we call the laws of nature, that they are ever obedient to man’s will, or that he can use them at all” (*An Humble Attempt*). That God was sovereign over all things was merely taken for granted by the patriarchs: of course, God is sovereign. And, while it may have been forgotten during Israel’s 400 years of captivity in Egypt, His sovereignty would have become abundantly clear to the people of Israel in Moses’ day.

The Law of God reveals the sovereign power and might of Three-in-One, eternal and holy God in three ways.

The sovereign Creator

First, God is sovereign in that He created the world and all things in it according to His purposes and for His pleasure. You have probably heard it said that God created the universe “out of nothing.” This is true, except for the creation of living creatures, which were made from the things of earth. Even then, the earth only produced plants and animals, as well as Adam, at the command or by the direct involvement of God. It is perhaps more accurate to say that God created the universe *into* nothing, for nothing existed outside of God when He created the world and everything in it.

God by His mighty power spoke the creation into being, out of nothing and into nothing. He did not need the creation in order to fill up some lacuna in His own being or existence; rather, He freely chose to create it,

and He created it according to His will and power, and as an expression of His grace. The matter of which the creation exists is not eternal; only God is eternal. God spoke the matter of the cosmos into being, and everything in the cosmos which is comprised of that matter.

God is sovereign over everything, and He is sovereign over nothing. Nothing existed when God began to create. Yet God made nothing into something good, by filling it with everything that agreed with His purpose and plan. God's people should not be discouraged when "nothing" exists which seems desirable or possible according to God's purposes or plan. God is sovereign over "nothing", making all the nothings of our lives into good things, according to His purposes.

Sovereign over creation

Second, the people of Israel would have observed the sovereignty of God in His ability to command the creation to accomplish His pleasure. The sea parted, rocks gave forth water, poisoned wells were cleansed, food fell from heaven, plagues descended, the river divided, the hearts of men melted – all at the command of God.

Doubtless, thoughtful Israelites would have seen in such displays a power that commands the creation at all times and in all its creatures and powers. The "laws of physics" are by secular thinkers regarded as principles inherent in matter, embedded in the stuff of the cosmos, which determine how matter coheres, functions, and relates. But the laws of physics are not *determinative* of the cosmos; they are merely *descriptive*, and what they describe are the ways God faithfully and powerfully upholds the cosmos and everything He has made by His Word of power (Heb. 1.3).

God is sovereign in creating and commanding and sustaining what He has made. The world and everything in it are the creation and obedient servants of the Three-in-One, eternal and holy God (Ps. 24.1; 119.89-91).

Sovereign in redemption

Third, God is sovereign in delivering His people from bondage to sin, to life in His covenant. Not even the greatest nation of its time could stand against God when He determined to call His people unto Himself. And no nation would be able to resist God, or His people, as they undertook His holy plan and covenant to create a new nation and to bring into being a new worldview before the pagan peoples of the earth.

God rules the creation, and He rules all the nations of the earth, establishing their boundaries and appointing their purposes within His larger, eternal and redemptive program.

The Three-in-One, eternal, holy God of the covenant is sovereign over everything. And we can believe that He stands ready to exercise His sovereignty in the outworking of that worldview He has promulgated, beginning in His Law.

Questions for reflection

1. What do we mean by saying God is sovereign? Is God sovereign still today?
2. How should knowing God is sovereign affect our prayers?
3. God is sovereign, and He exercises His sovereignty in line with His Word. How should knowing this affect our attitude toward and use of Scripture?

Next steps – Transformation: How can contemplating the sovereignty of God increase and improve your prayers of thanksgiving and praise? How can it help you in learning to pray without ceasing? Let the sovereignty of God inform your prayers throughout the day. Then at the end of the day, review all the reasons you have to give thanks and praise to God.

6 The Sovereign God is Gracious

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 7.6-8

Why?

One of the most pressing questions any worldview must consider is, “Why is there anything rather than nothing?” Put another way, “What reason can we proffer to explain the existence of the cosmos and everything in it?”

A second and more personal turn to that question also arises: “Why me?” To the ancient people of Israel, freshly delivered from the bondage of Egypt and poised to claim the land of promise for themselves, the question might have taken the form, “Why us?”

The answer to all these questions is the same: The Three-in-One, eternal, holy, and sovereign God is gracious. Moved by nothing more than His own love, God made the world to share in His goodness and refract His glory. By grace alone, God made human beings, and gave them dominion over all creation, to serve, cultivate, develop, and guard it for good (Gen. 2.15). And out of His unfathomable and mysterious grace, God chose Israel to be His holy people, and to bear witness to His wisdom, understanding, justice, and love to the rest of the world.

The world exists, people exist and have a purpose in the world, and a chosen people knows, loves, and serves the sovereign God Who redeems them, because of the grace of God.

What is grace?

The idea of grace is not well understood, even by many who have come to realize its saving power. Its importance in the divine program emerges, like everything else in the Christian worldview, in the Law of God. Moses tells us that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6.8). Moses understood himself to have found grace in the sight of the LORD (Ex. 33.13), as had the people he led out of Egypt (Ex. 33.16). On the basis of that grace, Moses pled with God to maintain His Presence with him and the people of Israel, that they might realize their calling as a holy people (Ex. 33.16). God is gracious (Ex. 22.7), and He informed Moses that the exercise of His grace was entirely a matter of His own prerogative, that He shows it to whom He will and withholds it from whom He will (Ex. 33.19). That the people of Israel might always remember that God is gracious, He gave a special blessing to pronounce over the people, as part of their worship of Him (Num. 6.24-26):

“The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.”

Moses’ calling and Israel’s redemption were the result of God’s grace. But what is grace?

Grace has two components. First, grace is a *disposition* in God to extend His favor and goodness to the things He has made. Second, grace is the peculiar *power of God* which brings His goodness to bear on things. What God *looks upon with favor*, He then *acts toward for good*.

We must say just a bit more: God's grace can be distinguished as applying, in one sense, to everything He has made – all creation and all people. We may think of this as God's *common grace*, in that He looks favorably upon and extends His goodness to all creatures in common.

But God's grace reaches to certain people in a saving way, as with the people of Israel. These are people whom, in the sovereign determination of God, He is disposed toward and actually saves for Himself to be a holy people. We refer to this manifestation of God's grace as His *saving grace*.

The grace of God is the love with which He looks upon and acts toward His creation, and especially toward His people.

God's grace to Israel

God did not need the world, but He made it. He made it and it was very good to Him; therefore, it must have reflected Him. The world thus knows a measure of the pleasure and fulfillment that exist in the Three-in-One God. Out of His love for all He has made, God the Creator and Sovereign extends to helpless creatures the experience of His goodness – the experience of Himself. God's common grace is at work in the world still.

Out of His redeeming love, God called a man to be the father of many nations (Gen. 12.1-3). In love God entered into a covenant with this man and his seed, and in love He took it upon Himself to fulfill that covenant in all that it requires (Gen. 15; cf. Rom. 4.13-18). From that one man, a people descended on whom God set His love unto their redemption. In love He sustained them through the wilderness, and spread before them a good land to be the temporal staging-ground for the next stage of covenant blessing.

In love God gave His Law to this people so that they, like creation before the fall, might enter into His goodness and love, and live in holiness and love toward Him and their neighbors.

The God of the Law of God is a God of love; the worldview promulgated in that Law is, first, unto holiness, and, at the same time, unto love – for God, as of first importance, and for our neighbors as ourselves.

We do not truly understand the worldview of God's Law if we do not embrace and experience it as a worldview expressive of God Himself – a worldview of love. For the God of the Law is a gracious God.

Questions for reflection

1. How would you explain the concept of grace to an unbelieving friend?
2. What do we mean by the term, *common grace*? Give some examples.
3. Why must we begin with the Law of God if we want to understand His grace and love?

Next steps – Preparation: Spend some time meditating on all the ways God reaches you with His grace each day. Offer Him praise and thanks for each one.

7 The Self-Revealing God

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." Exodus 34.6, 7

The God of the Christian worldview

In a most introductory way, we have been considering God as He is presented in the first five books of the Bible, the Law of Moses. We begin our study of Christian worldview with God. He is the Creator of the world and all things. He sustains and rules the creation. And it seems very clear that God has an abiding interest in how things should go with the creation and its peoples.

The Christian worldview unfolds "under the heavens", as Solomon might say. And from just what we've seen about God thus far, this only makes sense. There is but one God, Who created and rules all things, and Who consists in three Persons, each one equally God, bound together in a fellowship of being, communion, collaboration, and complementarity. The Three-in-One God is eternal. He has always existed, He will always exist, and He is altogether unchanging. He is the Great "I AM." The eternal God is also holy; He is perfect in all His virtues and ways, lacking nothing. The holy God is sovereign; everything is from Him, subsists by Him, and is subject to His purposes and will. And this God is also gracious. God loves the world and its creatures, and He especially loves that people He has chosen for Himself – to be a holy people before Him, to glorify Him and extend His blessings to the world.

There is no other God besides this God. The entirety of the Christian worldview derives from God, focuses on knowing and serving God, orients all its activities unto God, and shapes its adherents to seek Him and His Kingdom and glory in all they are and do.

And we know all this about God because He has revealed Himself to us. The Three-in-One, eternal, holy, sovereign, and gracious God is a self-revealing God. He calls people to know Him, and to realize His good and glorious purposes and plan. The self-revealing character of God is crucial to the wellbeing of His creatures, and especially humankind.

To recover God's good plan

God's plan for His people was for their good (Gen. 1.31; Jer. 29.11). He created all things very good, and He gave His people dominion over the creation, to develop and extend that goodness over all the earth and to all its creatures. The fall into sin did not cancel God's plan; instead, He extended His covenant to His chosen people, that they might recover a measure of what had been lost at the fall, and enjoy the good blessings He intended for them from the beginning.

But none of this would have been immediately evident to people, because sin had blinded them to God's purposes (cf. Rom. 11.8ff). Made in His image, to know and love God, sinful people turn away from Him, preferring their own ideals and wiles to His ways and will. If God wants people to know His will and blessings, He cannot rely on them to figure these out for themselves. He has to make Himself and His purposes known, and it is His pleasure to do so clearly and abundantly.

Thus, just as God revealed Himself to Moses from out of the burning bush, so He made Himself known to His people through the books of the Law, in manifestations of glory and power, in His clear and undeniable presence in their midst, and in His spoken and written Word. By receiving and heeding His revelation, God's people would know Him, receive the blessings He intended for them, and begin the work of extending those blessings to the world.

Vehicles of revelation

The Christian worldview insists that God does not leave us to our own wits and wiles, to grope and guess about what's right or best, or to figure out His being, purposes, or will. He reveals Himself and His will in a variety of ways.

The vehicles of divine revelation, as revealed in His Law, are varied: He makes His glory known through created things. The heavens and the earth and all the creatures in them declare the presence and display the glory of God, inviting people to seek and consider Him and His will. God reveals His will through divinely-sent spiritual messengers – part of that vast realm of unseen things which we will consider in our next study in this series. In the books of Moses, God communicated to His chosen people in dreams. He instructed them to create artifacts and institutions of culture that reveal His character and will, and enable His people to be refreshed and reinforced in their calling. He spoke to His prophets in actual words, and He spoke through them in the words they proclaimed to His people. And by Moses' hand, God encoded His purposes and will in written words.

We are surrounded by windows onto the glory of God, avenues of divine revelation whereby we may learn more about the God Who made, keeps, redeems, and loves us. Our privilege and calling is to make good use of these many vehicles of divine self-revelation, that we might have a fuller view of God, increase in love for Him, and organize our lives and world to bring Him the greatest possible glory.

The worldview which begins to unfold in God's Law instructs us to look to God, through all His means of revelation, but fundamentally, through His Word, so that we might know Him and His will and, knowing Him, might fear, obey, love, serve, and glorify Him in all we do.

Because the worldview of goodness and blessing God has promulgated in His Law depends, for its realization, on knowing Him, God has abundantly accommodated to our sinful and helpless estate by making Himself known to us through words and deeds. We can know God, and knowing Him is the sum and substance of the life He offers (Jn. 17.3). Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord (Hos. 6.3), so that we may enter into His covenant and worldview, enjoy His blessings, and live in His goodness all our days.

Questions for reflection

1. Why is it important to know that God reveals Himself and His will to people?
2. Give some examples of the many ways God revealed Himself in the Law of Moses.
3. How should people respond to the revelation of God? What may we expect as we do?

Next steps – Preparation: God reveals Himself to His people in His Word and through His world. How can you improve your use of these vehicles of revelation to help you in knowing, loving, and serving the Lord?

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Is there a danger that our thinking about God could be too small? Explain.
2. Summarize the important aspects about God which are revealed in His Law.
3. How does God reveal Himself today? What is our responsibility, as the people of God, for accessing this revelation?
4. Why has God chosen to reveal Himself to His people? What is His plan for us?
5. What's the most important lesson you've gained from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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