

THE ESSENCE AND GLORY OF GOD: Exodus 34:5-9.

INTRODUCTION. Open your Bibles with me, men, to Exodus 34:5-9 and your Confessions to chapter 2, paragraph 1. **Q. Who is God? What is He like? How would you answer that question?** We have the question answered for us clearly in Exodus 34:5-7, where God Himself tells us who He is and what He is like.

You do not need to go to second hand information with the person Himself will talk with you.

But I wonder when asked that question where you would turn? If you were to open the Bible, what passage would you lay before the eyes of your questioner? Let it be Exodus 34:5-7 henceforth!

DOCTRINE. The essence and glory of God are chiefly comprehended by reflecting upon His attributes as revealed in the Scriptures.

Two questions need to be asked and answered as it pertains to this text and doctrine:

QUESTION 1. What is God's Essence? A1. God's Essence is His eternal self-existence.

QUESTION 2. What is God's glory? A2. God's glory is the weight and magnitude of all His perfections.

Though God is simple or indivisible, not made up of parts or components, we can distinguish between His attributes to better understand what He is like. God Himself even does this when revealing Himself to Moses, so we are surely allowed to do it.

You must never think that God's attributes are divided from one another, as if they are in competition or that sometimes one outweighs the other. However you can distinguish between His attributes to better understand who He is and what He is like.

Now, before we look at Exodus 34:5-9, consider with me the background of this scene by first looking at Exodus 33:18-23.

Exodus 33:18-23 "18 Moses said, 'Please show me your glory.' 19 And he said, 'I will make all my *goodness* pass before you and will *proclaim* before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20 But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.' 21 And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

When Moses asks to see the LORD's glory, the LORD essentially says, "You cannot see me, but I will speak."

OUTLINE. There are two main points in this text, each with multiple subpoints. Then four concluding exhortations I want to give you as shepherds.

I. THE ESSENCE AND GLORY OF GOD IS CHIEFLY COMPREHENDED BY REFLECTING UPON HIS ATTRIBUTES (**Ex. 34:5-7**).

II. YOU SHOULD RESPOND TO SEEING THE GLORY OF THE LORD WITH THE EYES OF FAITH JUST LIKE MOSES DID (**Ex. 34:8-9**).

III. FOUR EXHORTATIONS.

I. THE ESSENCE AND GLORY OF GOD IS CHIEFLY COMPREHENDED BY REFLECTING UPON HIS ATTRIBUTES (or PERFECTIONS) (Ex. 34:5-7).

Exodus 34:5-6a "5 The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and *proclaimed* the name of the LORD. 6a The LORD passed before him and *proclaimed...*"

- **WILHELMUS À BRAKEL:** "You, who pretend to have some knowledge of God, tell me, "What is His name and what is His Son's name if thou canst tell?" (Pro. 30:4). All I can say is that the essence of God is His eternal self-existence. . . Whoever wishes to know more concerning God's essence should join me in worship as we close our eyes before this unapproachable light. It is in some measure revealed to the soul; however, we can only perceive the uttermost fringes of His Being by reflecting upon the divine attributes."

Q. What are the divine attributes or perfections of God?

A. Well there is a distinction between God's *incommunicable attributes*, which we can have no resemblance of, and His *communicable attributes*, which we who are made in His image and redeemed by His mercy can have a slight resemblance of in ourselves. His *incommunicable attributes* are laid out in the first half of the 1689 Baptist Confession, chapter 2, paragraph 1.

— THE — 1689

BAPTIST CONFSSION OF FAITH

PARAGRAPH 1

The Lord our God is but one only living and true God;¹ whose subsistence is in and of Himself,² infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself;³ a most pure spirit,⁴ invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto;⁵ who is immutable,⁶ immense,⁷ eternal,⁸ incomprehensible, almighty,⁹ every way infinite, most holy,¹⁰ most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will,¹¹ for His own glory;¹² most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him,¹³ and withal most just and terrible in His judgments,¹⁴ hating all sin,¹⁵ and who will by no means clear the guilty.¹⁶

QUESTION. Now what are the attributes which God reveals concerning Himself to Moses in Exodus 34?

ANSWER. There are at least 7 in this text, and they are *communicable*.

By the way, it is important to note that all three persons in the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit, have these all of these perfections (both incommunicable and communicable) because they are one God, eternally existing in three Persons.

But let us now consider the communicable attributes God details as he reveals Himself to Moses on the holy mount:

I) The LORD is merciful (v. 6a).

Exodus 34:6a The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God *merciful*' (*compassionate*)

- **This word is only ever used when talking about the LORD God Himself in the Old Testament.**
 - **Deuteronomy 4:31** "The LORD your God is a *merciful* God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them."
 - **Luke 6:36** "Be merciful, just as your Heavenly Father is merciful."
 - **MATTHEW HENRY:** "He is merciful. This bespeaks his tender compassion, like that of a father to his children. This is put first, because it is the first wheel in all the instances of God's good-will to fallen man."

II) The LORD is gracious (v. 6b).

Exodus 34:6b "and gracious,"

- **This is God's goodness.**
- **Joel 2:13** "Rend your hearts and not your garments. Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious."
 - **Hebrews 2:17** "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a *merciful* and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

III) The LORD is patient (v. 6c).

Exodus 34:6c "slow to anger,"

- **Nahum 1:3** "The Lord is *slow to anger* and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet."
- **2 Peter 3:9** "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is *patient* toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

IV) The LORD is abounding in lovingkindness (v. 6d).

Exodus 34:6d "and abounding in steadfast love" (*hesed*).

- This is God's covenant love for His people, which overflows with His kindness.
- **Psalms 136:1** "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast

love endures forever."

- **Ephesians 2:4-5** "But God, being rich in mercy (lovingkindness), because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved..."

V) The LORD is abounding in faithfulness (v. 6e).

Exodus 34:6e "abounding in...faithfulness," (*this has to do not as much with loyalty as it does with truthfulness*).

- **Psalm 19:9** "the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are *true*, and righteous altogether."
- **John 14:6** "I am the way and the *truth* and the life."

VI) The LORD is forgiving (v. 7a).

Exodus 34:7a "keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," ("*thousands*" being the highest number word they used) (*Forgive = lifting off, carry away*)

- **CALVIN:** "Here appears the extent of His goodness, since He blots out an infinite mass of iniquities."
- **Psalm 85:2** "You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You covered all their sin. *Selah*."
- **1 John 2:12** "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake."
 - **MATTHEW HENRY:** "The springs of mercy are always full, the streams of mercy always flowing; there is mercy enough in God, enough for all, enough for each, enough for ever."

VII) The LORD is holy and just (v. 7b).

Exodus 34:7b "but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

- This underscores both God's holiness and unwavering justice.

CALVIN: "Although God is pitiful and even ready to pardon, yet He does not therefore spare the despisers, but is a severe avenger of their impiety."

- **THOMAS WATSON:** "God's holiness consists in his perfect love of righteousness, and perfect abhorrence of evil."
 - **Isaiah 6:3** "And one [Seraphim] called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"
 - **Revelation 4:8** "Day and night [the angels] never cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'"
 - ****TURN WITH ME TO****

Nahum 1:2-6

"2 The Lord is a jealous and avenging God;
the Lord is avenging and wrathful;
the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries
and keeps wrath for his enemies.

3 The Lord is slow to anger and great in power,
and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty.
His way is in whirlwind and storm,
and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

4 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry;
he dries up all the rivers;
Bashan and Carmel wither;
the bloom of Lebanon withers.

5 The mountains quake before him;
the hills melt;
the earth heaves before him,
the world and all who dwell in it.

6 Who can stand before his indignation?
Who can endure the heat of his anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire,
and the rocks are broken into pieces by him."

- **WILHELMUS A BRAKEL:** "Holiness is the pure essence of the character of God...it relates to the brightness of all His perfections. . .The Lord continually reveals Himself as holy, in order that the heart of man may continually be filled with deep awe and reverence. . . The Lord is not merely called holy but is holiness itself."
- **JONATHAN EDWARDS:** "The holiness of God will not suffer him to give the least countenance to sin, but inclines him to give proper testimonies of his hatred of it. But Christ having satisfied for sin, God can now love the sinner, and give no countenance at all to sin, however great a sinner he may have been. It was a sufficient testimony of God's abhorrence of sin, that he poured out his wrath on his own dear Son, when he took the guilt of it upon himself. Nothing can more show God's abhorrence of sin than this. If all mankind had been eternally damned, it would not have been so great a testimony of it."

NOW LET ME GIVE YOU AN IMPORTANT POINT, AND WHY WE BEGIN SHEPHERD SCHOOL SEASON ONE WITH CHRISTOLOGY RATHER THAN THEOLOGY PROPER:

Under the Old Covenant God revealed Himself to His people

through types, shadows, visions, dreams, Theophanies, and Christophanies, but now God reveals His essence and glory to us marvelously in the Lord Jesus Christ!

- **Hebrews 1:1-3** "1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."
- **2 Corinthians 4:6** "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Q. How should someone respond to this great God? How would you respond? We also have that question clearly answered for us in Exodus 34:8-9!

II. YOU SHOULD RESPOND TO SEEING THE GLORY OF THE LORD WITH THE EYES OF FAITH JUST LIKE MOSES DID (Exodus 34:8-9).

5 DIRECTIONS WE CAN GLEAN FROM MOSES' RESPONSE TO THE GLORIOUS TRIUNE GOD:

If you have beheld the glory of the Lord shining in Jesus Christ,

I) You should respond in worship (v. 8).

Exodus 34:8 "And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped."

If you have beheld the glory of the Lord shining in Jesus Christ,

II) You should plead for God's favorable presence (v. 9a).

Exodus 34:9a "And he said, 'If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord (*Adonai*), please let the (my) Lord (*Adonai*) go in the midst of us,'"

If you have beheld the glory of the Lord shining in Jesus Christ,

III) You should confess your sin (v. 9b).

Exodus 34:9b 'for it is a stiff-necked people,'

If you have beheld the glory of the Lord shining in Jesus Christ,

IV) You should plead for pardon (v. 9c).

Exodus 34:9c 'and pardon our iniquity and our sin,'

If you have beheld the glory of the Lord shining in Jesus Christ,

V) You should plead for the LORD to take you and your people as His possession (9d).

Exodus 349d 'and take us for your inheritance.'"

Q. How do you respond when you hear the Word of God and behold His glory shining in the face of Christ in private worship? In family worship? How do you respond in public worship?

III. FOUR SHORT EXHORTATIONS TO CLOSE.

I) Memorize this passage of Scripture and its meaning.

II) Learn the perfections of God for yourself.

- **(i)** Read and re-read the section on God's attributes from À Brakel.
- **(ii)** A.W. Pink has a great short book called *The Attributes of God*.
- **(iii)** Stephen Lawson has a teaching series on Ligonier called *The Attributes of God*.
- **(iv)** Stephen Charnock has a masterful two volume work called *The Existence and Attributes of God (in his works, volumes 1-2 of 5 from Banner of Truth; in addition, Crossway has just published a beautiful and sturdy two volume set of it)*.

III) Teach the attributes of God to your wife and kids, and anyone else under your spiritual care.

IV) Teach the proper response to God's revelation of Himself in Christ, and pray for Him to grant those responses in yourself and those under your care.

CONCLUSION. May God give us the grace we need to respond to His great glory as we should. SOLI DEO GLORIA.

Exodus 34:5-9

[5] The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. [6] The LORD passed before him and

proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping

steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the

fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." [8] And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. [9] And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance."

Twins

Compassionate

merciful

Always of God

Full of pity

twin sister of 'merciful'

hears the cries before and respect

adj.

★ Heseḏ ★

Zealous love

Truthfulness

248x in OT

Loving Kindness

★ Heseḏ ★

Highest numbered word used in Heb.

to carry away even on one's own back

perversity

depravity

mischief

monat evil

rebellion

revolt

Patient

Longsuffering

miss step

slipping of the foot