

Sanctification in Community: The Doctrine of God, Part 1

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I. The Self-Revelation of God

Since God’s existence cannot be proven by observation, logical correlation, and “proofs,” God must have disclosed himself to man, or God could never be found. In previous sections of these notes we identified seven channels of divine revelation, two under the heading of general revelation, and five under the heading of special revelation. The following is a delineation of these sources of divine self-revelation.

General Revelation	Special Revelation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Material Creation• Man’s Constitution and Conscience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• God’s Mighty Acts• The Lives of Believers• The Bible• Jesus Christ

A. The Material Creation

1. Biblical Proof

Psalm 19:1–4—The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Romans 1:20—For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Acts 14:17—He has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.

See also Job 12:7–9; 36:24–37:24; 38–39; Isaiah 40:26

2. Limitations

- a. Although revelation of God in the material creation is accessible to all, it is

actually welcomed by none because of *depravity*.

Romans 1:18—Wicked men suppress the truth in their wickedness.

1 Corinthians 1:21—The world through its wisdom did not know God.

- b. The revelation of God in the material creation is obscured by the *problem of evil*. The Fall has introduced to the material realm all manner of disease, corruption, natural disasters, etc. (Isa 45:7), causing men to think of God as cruel and arbitrary, when they really are seeing the effects of their own sin.
- c. Revelation of God in the material creation is *incomplete*. It cannot, for instance, lead anyone to salvation because it does not inform man of God's redemptive nature, the person of Christ, the necessity of faith and repentance, etc. Its most visible function, in fact, is to leave men "without excuse" (Rom 1:20; 2:1).

B. Man's Constitution and Conscience

1. Biblical Proof

Genesis 1:26–27—The image of God in man communicates something of God's nature and function.

Psalms 139:14—I will praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Romans 2:14–15—When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

2. Limitations

- a. Man misuses the capacities intrinsic to the divine image and lacks the attendant divine perfections.
- b. Again, the problem of evil clouds the majesty and beauty of God's creative genius in creating man.
- c. The human conscience can become "seared" through habitual disregard (1 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:15) and "weakened" by false information (1 Cor 8:7–12; 10:29).

C. God's Mighty Acts (His Miraculous and Providential Works)

1. Biblical Proof

Exodus 5:1–2 with 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:19, 28; 9:14, 28; 10:2, 17—The plagues against Egypt successfully informed Pharaoh of the God he claimed not to know.

2 Kings 5:15—Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel."

See also Exodus 15:1–19; 18:11; Numbers 14:11; Joshua 2:10–11; 4:23–24; 1 Samuel 4:7–8; Isa 45:1–6; Ezek 11:9–10; Acts 14:17.

2. Limitations

- a. Although the mighty acts were quite spectacular, they actually were one of the most localized and inefficient means for revealing God. The revelation was accessible only to those who saw the mighty acts or heard about them.
- b. God’s mighty acts and providence always need an infallible interpreter present; without him they are regularly misinterpreted.

John 12:28–29—The voice of God was mistaken for the sound of thunder or the voice of an angel (see also Acts 9:7).

Acts 14:11—Paul and Barnabas’s miracle was misinterpreted as the Roman pantheon coming down.

The significance of the Genesis Flood is lost apart from Genesis 6:12.

The significance of the rainbow is lost apart from Genesis 9:12–17.

The significance of the defeat of Sennacherib is lost apart from 2 Kings 19:35–36.

The significance of Christ’s death and resurrection is lost apart from the NT.

Note the Principle of Amos 3:7—“Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”

- c. It is unlikely that mighty acts or miracles are occurring today; if they are, they do not seem to be a major plank in God’s self-revelation.

D. The Lives of God’s People

1. Biblical Proof

Matthew 5:13–15—Believers are the “light of the world.”

2 Corinthians 3:2–3—Believers are a “letter of Christ, known and read of all men.”

See also 2 Corinthians 4:6–11; Colossians 4:6–11; 1 Peter 2:9

2. Limitation—Not all people come into contact with believers, and those that do discover believers who frequently misrepresent God.

E. The Bible

1. Biblical Proof

The whole Bible gives abundant, propositional testimony to the nature and character of God.

2. Limitations

- a. It is limited to those who can read or at least understand the Bible, and to those who have the Bible carefully translated in their own language.
- b. While human language as employed in the Bible is adequate to reveal God, it does not comprehensively reveal him.

F. Jesus Christ

1. Biblical Proof

Matthew 1:23—Christ is called *Immanuel* or God with us.

John 5:19; 12:45; 14:8–9; 16:15

Colossians 2:9—In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.

Hebrews 1:2–3—In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

God could not have revealed himself more fully than he did in Jesus Christ. No other medium of revelation had the capacity to actually *be* God. The other forms of revelation objectively and analogically explain him, but Christ actually is God and possesses a divine nature.

2. The Superiority of Christ to Other Vehicles of Divine Self-Revelation

- a. Unlike the other vehicles of divine self-revelation, Jesus is personal, fulfilling man's greatest real need.

Job 9:32–33—God is not a man like me.... If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both.

Isaiah 64:1—Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!

Revelation 21:3—Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

- b. It is the most perfect and complete vehicle of divine self-revelation.

Jesus Christ is not occluded by sin, and has the greatest potential to serve as a growing aggregate of divine revelation. God will always be incomprehensible after he is revealed in Jesus, and even eternity will not fully disclose all there is to know of God. However, believers will know more of God when they see Christ, and he will be the source of all additional knowledge about God upon the commencement of eternity (1 Cor 13:12; Rev. 22:4).

3. Limitations
 - a. Christ cannot be materially known today.
 - b. The person and mission of Christ have been grossly distorted by some.
 - c. Ultimately, however, the only limitation on this source will be the finiteness of the human mind.

Conclusion: While Christ is the highest form of divine self-disclosure, the Bible reigns today as the greatest form of divine disclosure:

- **The Bible is the greatest *accessible* form of divine self-disclosure in view of the absence of Christ.**
- **The Bible provides the only *authoritative* accounting of and commentary on the other sources of revelation.**
- **The Bible gives the only *authentic* disclosure of the person and work of Jesus Christ.**

II. The Personality of God

Personality is a cluster of innate functions or capacities that render one a truly spiritual being—functions that distinguish God and humanity from the rest of the material creation. We argue in these notes that these supply the substance of the image of God in man. It is the goal of sanctification/counseling to align the outworking of these functions in our lives with the perfections that exhibit in God himself (and especially in the person of Christ).

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|----------------|------------|----------------------|
| • Spirituality | • Purpose | • Self-Consciousness |
| • Life | • Activity | • Freedom |
| • Intelligence | • Emotion | • Moral Agency |

A. Spirituality

1. The Meaning of God's Spirituality
 - a. By spirituality is meant that all persons have an indestructible, enduring identity apart from a physical body. This does not mean that persons with bodies are in some way deficient, but it does mean that persons have no necessary connection with bodies that assures their ongoing existence. All persons *are* spirits, but some *have* bodies.
 - b. Spirit is thus the invisible, metaphysical source of personality.

Romans 1:20—God's nature is composed of invisible attributes

Colossians 1:15—Christ is the image of the [ordinarily] invisible God.

1 Timothy 1:17—Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be

honor and glory forever and ever.

The second commandment, which prohibits graven images, is a tribute to God's spirituality. He is not to be worshipped materially, but spiritually (cf. John 4:24).

- c. God alone is *pure* spirit.

God is the exemplary, unsourced, and perfectly self-consistent spirit from which all other spirits derive their created identity. He is distinguished from all lesser spirits in terms of origin and containment

John 4:24—God is spirit.

Hebrews 12:9—God is the “father of spirits.”

2. Significance for Sanctification

As humans we are more than material entities. We are psychosomatic unities that are designed to engage as whole persons (mind, will, and affections) in all that we do. Failure to do so is to fall short of our personal potential.

John 4:24—God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.

B. Life

1. Biblical Proof

Jeremiah 10:10—But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King.

1 Timothy 4:10—The living God is the savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

Hebrews 10:30–31—It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

2. The Meaning of Life

a. In saying that God is living, we mean more than the simple scientific definition (that includes animals and even plants). We mean the term in a more theological sense as potential energy directed by its own intelligence. As a living being, God is able to consciously do things external to himself.

b. Just as was the case with God's spirituality, God's life can be distinguished from the life possessed by other living persons in that all other life derives from God.

John 1:4—In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

Acts 17:28—In him we live and move and have our being.... We are his offspring.

3. The Functions of Life. The Living God can:

- a. Speak (Deut 5:26).

- b. Create and preserve the universe (Jer 10:10–13).
 - c. Provide deliverance (Dan 6:26–27).
 - d. Perform miracles (Josh 3:10–17).
 - e. Redeem men (1 Tim 4:10)
 - f. Judge sin (Heb 10:30–31).
4. Significance for Sanctification
- a. Just as it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (because of what he can do to us), so it is a deeply satisfying thing to be the object of his affection, knowing what he can do for and in us.
 - b. As living and as regenerated beings, we have not only the capacity but also the renewed nature to cultivate virtues, godly disciplines, and spiritual fruit.

C. Intelligence

1. Biblical Proof

1 Samuel 2:3—The LORD is a God who knows.

Proverbs 3:19–20—By wisdom the LORD laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.

Romans 11:33—Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God..

2. The Meaning of Intelligence

As used above, knowledge is the possession of facts; understanding is the correlation of facts; Wisdom is the ability to apply those facts for good ends. All persons have these skills to some degree; God possesses them perfectly.

3. Significance for Sanctification

As rational and linguistic beings we have the capacity to know God truly, to access his expectations for us, to cultivate the discernment and wisdom necessary to applying his word to our respective life situations.

D. Purpose

1. Biblical Proof

Isaiah 14:26–27—This is the plan determined for the whole world.... For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him?

Ephesians 1:11—Our election was “predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

2. The Meaning of Purpose

Purpose is reaction to a future goal, which exists only in the mind, as though it were already present. Personal beings can construct plans apart from brute instinct, and exercise personal prerogatives to achieve those plans. Animals react only to the stimulus of the moment—they cannot contradict instinct in pursuit of a self-devised goal.

3. Significance for Sanctification

- a. God has decreed all things with infinite wisdom and is carrying them forward in his providence to ends that are utterly beneficial to us (Rom 8:28) and necessary to his most wise ends.
- b. We, too, may cultivate purpose—goals and plans that are in keeping with our capacity to see ourselves as “seated in the heavenlies” (Eph 2:6), having entered “into the kingdom of his dear son” (Col 1:13).

E. Action

1. Biblical Proof

Psalm 46:8—Come see the works of the Lord.

John 5:17—My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.

Philippians 2:13—God works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. God is active.

2. The Meaning of Action

God independently performs deeds. He does so because he can (*life*) and because he has decided to do so (in accordance with his *purposes*).

F. Freedom

1. Biblical Proof

Job 23:13—He does whatever he pleases.

Daniel 4:35—He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What are you doing?”

Ephesians 1:11—He works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

2. The Meaning of Freedom

- a. Freedom is self-determination, the ability to make determinations *in keeping with one’s nature and purposes*.

- b. Kinds of Freedom

(1) *Freedom of Indifference or contra-causal freedom* is the freedom to do not

only what one desires, but also the opposite. It is unlikely that any person could ever have this kind of freedom. Even God does not possess this freedom since he is restricted by his own nature (e.g., Titus 1:2).

- (2) *Freedom of Spontaneity* is the freedom to make choices according to one's own nature, purposes, and governing desires apart from external compulsion. All persons have such freedom, but finite persons are restricted in the execution of these choices. Only God is wholly free or *sovereign* in that he is bound in neither the realm of his choices or their implementation by any force external to himself.

Question: Do humans have a free will?

In view of the preceding, it seems necessary to assign to man freedom of spontaneity in that he is not coerced to choose anything contrary to his own nature, purposes, and governing desires. That is, he chooses ever according to his own nature, but in his depraved state possesses no chaste intentions. As such it may rightly be said that he **cannot** please God (Rom 8:6–8, etc.), while at the same time maintaining that he is truly free and therefore culpable. See below under the image of God in man.

In what Thomas Boston calls their “recovering state,” however, all believers have the capacity to please God, and also the duty to do so.

G. Feeling

1. Biblical Proof

Isaiah 63:9–10—In all their distress he too was *distressed*.... In his *love* and *mercy* he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and *grieved* his Holy Spirit.

Psalms 11:5–7—The wicked and those who love violence his soul *hates*.... But the LORD is righteous, he *loves* justice.

2. The Range Personal Feelings

- a. *Appetites* are those psychosomatic impulses directed toward the satiation of finite humanity's needs and desires (e.g., hunger, thirst, the need to reproduce, etc.). God does not have these (but experiences them in Christ's humanity).
- b. *Passions* are those impulses of the “lower soul” of non-omniscient beings in response to stimuli for which they are unprepared. God does not have passions either (but experiences them in Christ's humanity).
- c. *Affections* are those cultured inclinations and aversions of the “upper soul” and will of personal beings to abstract concepts such as God, beauty, goodness, truth, and also their opposites. God has a full range of chaste affections.

3. The Significance of Personal Feelings to Sanctification

- a. In his humanity, Christ is fully acquainted with our griefs and our sorrows, our weaknesses and our pain; and was tempted at all points like as we are, yet without a sin nature (Isa 53:3; Heb 4:15).
- b. While God as God does not have the appetites and passions that we possess in our finitude, his transcendence over these supplies us a model for chastening these and for cultivating the appropriate affections.
- c. Much of sanctification involves the domestication of these three aspects of feeling. Sanctification fails when they are untamed.

H. Self-Consciousness

1. Biblical Proof

Exodus 3:14—In response to the question who God is, he replies, “I Am who I Am.”

1 Corinthians 2:10b, 11b—The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

2. The Meaning of Self-Consciousness

Self-consciousness is the ability to objectify oneself in one's own thoughts and know that one has done so. It is the ability to abstractly reflect upon his self, analyzing motives, intentions, and affections. All persons can and ought to do this, but finite persons do so incompletely and are prone to self-deception (Ps 19:12; 139:23–24; 1 Cor 13: 12).

I. Moral Agency

1. Biblical Proof

Habakkuk 1:13—Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.

1 Peter 1:15–16—Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

2. The Meaning of Moral Agency

Moral agency is the awareness of obligation in issues of right and wrong that is unique to persons. It is the ability to say “I ought.” God is the standard of moral purity and is thus free from all that is evil, and perfectly represents what is good.

3. Significance for Sanctification

All persons have the capacity to say “I ought” (Rom 1:32; 2:14). And it is our responsibility to act as agents of God's convicting work in impressing this ought on our brothers and sisters in Christ (Matt 18:15–17). And while the fact that “I ought” does not necessitate that “I can” (the error of Arminianism), the regenerate man both ought and can.

III. The Image of God in Man

A. The Biblical Material

Genesis 1:26–27—God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness;...

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female.

Genesis 5:1, 3—In the day when God created man, he made him in the likeness of God....

And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of [a son] in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.

Genesis 9:6—Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God he made man.

1 Corinthians 11:7—A man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.

James 3:9—With [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God.

See also Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10.

B. Definition

The image of God consists of mankind’s personal and functional resemblance to God.

1. When humanity fell, he retained a personal, rational, and volitional resemblance to God, but thoroughly lost all ethical and moral resemblance to God. The former (the image of God) is retained by all humanity; the latter (the image of Christ) is being renewed in us day by day in the process of sanctification.
 - a. Scripture nowhere declares the *imago dei* to have been lost or damaged, but instead predicates the image of all humans, regenerate and unregenerate alike (Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9).
 - b. Scripture describes an *image of Christ*, which seems to consist primarily in moral perfections, and to which sanctification aspires (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). The *image of Christ* reflects that state of confirmed holiness that *could have been* Adam’s had he obeyed, and the state of holiness that *will be ours* at glorification.
3. The following chart details the image of God in four areas, and explains the utility for hermeneutics, theodicy, apologetics, and counseling:

The Capacity (retained intact by all humans as part of the <i>imago dei</i>, even those who are spiritually dead)	The Perfection (available to and developing in believers alone as part of the <i>imago Christi</i>)
Rational Capacity	Accepting the reasonable biblical worldview
Volitional Capacity	Choosing what is good and beautiful and true
Linguistic Capacity	Submitting to the Bible’s plain meaning
Religious Capacities	Desiring God

- a. The image of God explains how mankind may be treated in Scripture as

simultaneously having both *freedom* (i.e., the capacity to choose) and *inability* (i.e., the incapacity to choose what is good). Every man (regenerate or unregenerate) freely chooses according to the most dominant impulse of his nature. Inability does not imply the absence of natural freedom (a feature of all persons in God's image), but rather the presence of a corrupt nature.

- b. The image of God further explains how God may justly condemn a person who "cannot please God." The ethical basis of every sinner's condemnation is not his failure to do what he cannot do, *per se*, but his willing participation in what he should not do and what he knows that he should not do (Rom 1:32, etc.).
- c. The image of God offers a rationale for apologetics, and most especially, for *presuppositional* apologetics. When we speak to those described in Scripture as "dead," we speak not to brick walls having no capacity to understand the Christian message or even to feel the objective weight of Scripture truth. Because of the divine image, the plain Gospel is eminently understandable by and convincing to the simplest of human minds. As such, the Gospel needs only to be proclaimed (without any need for corroborating evidences or clever gimmickry). What the unregenerate need is not more data or better proofs to overcome a *sluggish* mind, but the impartation of a new nature to overcome a *hostile* mind.
- d. The image of God answers the tension of the faithful/faithless readings of Scripture. Because the linguistic capacity native to the divine image remains intact even in the foulest of sinners, he can read the Scriptures and perfectly grasp its meaning. What the unregenerate man needs is not greater linguistic capacities (the *imago dei* supplies that) or "deeper understanding" of its words, but a new heart that welcomes, embraces, and submits to the simple truths of Scripture in all of their significance (1 Cor 2:14–16).
- e. The image of God, finally, explains how mankind can understand, without being taught, the concept of ought (Rom 1:32; 2:14). It explains, further, how that sense of ought blossoms into ability in the regenerate. We can and must please God!