

SUSTAINED BY THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

BILL PATTON

*"There is only one true and living God, who is infinite in
being, power, and perfections."*

(The Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith, "The Triune God")

I know what it's like to wake up in the morning and wish the day was over. As I suppose is the case with all of us, I have found myself deeply perplexed and depressed at times. Life took some unexpected, unhappy turns—and to say that I was "down" during those seasons would be an understatement.

God, in His faithfulness, often met me in those moments, ministering profound comfort and help in my time of need. As I look back now, what is a little surprising to me is that God has so frequently carried out this reviving work in my soul through the reading of books, especially old books.

Two books, in particular, have sustained me. The first is entitled *The Existence and Attributes of God* by Steven Charnock, first published in 1682. Charnock's 1,100-page study of the existence of God, the eternity of God, the omnipresence of God, the knowledge of God, the power of God, the

holiness of God, the goodness of God, the patience of God, etc. is still my go-to resource when I become depressed. "Okay, brother Charnock...tell me again who God is."

My second go-to book is *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* by Jeremiah Burroughs. First published in 1648, it applies the doctrines of God's sovereignty and God's wisdom to Christian living with the goal of learning peaceful, quiet contentment.

So, I think it's accurate to say that few things have sustained me or brought greater comfort to my soul than the doctrine of God and his infinite attributes.

Spurgeon once said to his congregation:

*Here are words
which bring
comfort, hope, and
peace.*

"Would you lose your sorrow?
Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout

musing upon the subject of the Godhead."¹

Infinite in Being, Power, and Perfections

The doctrine of God in our *Statement of Faith* opens with these words: "*There is only one true and living God, who is infinite in being, power, and perfections.*" Every day our culture bombards us with a harsh, discordant cacophony of falsehood. And here, like a loud gavel in a chaotic courtroom, are words which silence the disorderly hubbub; words which blow away the polluted clouds of vain speculation; words which bring comfort, hope, and peace to all who have ears to hear them. *There is one true and living God!*

Those words dispel popular cultural notions that there is no God, or that

1. J.I. PACKER, *KNOWING GOD* (WESTMONT, IL: IVP, 1973), 14.

there are many gods, or that everything is somehow divine. God exists. There is but one God. He is the true and living God. And he possesses unique, infinite attributes which make him utterly unlike any of his creatures.

We humans tend to imagine that the conditions, bounds, and limits of our finite existence apply to God. But they do not. He is an infinite being—he has always existed, and he always will. Furthermore, God is not only infinite in being; he is infinite in *all* His perfections—which means there are no limits to any of his attributes; he is infinite in them all.

Hence God is boundless in power. He is the Almighty, omnipotent One. He can do anything and everything that he, in his wisdom and goodness, wills to do. Jeremiah, overwhelmed at the thought of God's infinite power, overflowed with worship:

*"Ah Lord God
behold thou hast made the heaven and the earth
by thy great power and outstretched arm...
and there is nothing too hard for thee..."*
(Jer. 32:17, KJV)

Infinite Goodness

God's infinite power alone can be a frightening thought: *What is this infinitely powerful God like? What might he do?* But God is not only infinitely powerful; he is also infinitely good. His goodness includes his love, his kindness, his mercy, his faithfulness, his compassion, and his generosity. How good is God? The depths of his goodness cannot be measured! We say that his love is as vast as the ocean, as deep as the sea, as high as the mountain. But those comparisons fall woefully short of the sheer vastness of God's goodness most overwhelmingly displayed at the cross of Christ.

Remembering that his kind and compassionate love towards his own will infinitely endure enables us to confess with David: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Ps. 23:6)

Infinite Holiness

God is also infinite holiness. When God calls himself "holy," it means that he is set apart, utterly distinct from his creation. It also means that he, and

everything which flows from him, are without moral blemish. His every thought, attitude, word, and deed are pure light, without taint or stain of moral darkness.

We can't get through a day—an hour—without moral imperfections. But God has always been, now is, and ever will be infinite moral perfection. That glorious holiness beautifies all his other attributes, including those that often appear unlovely or menacing in his creatures. So God's might is not volatile; it is a holy might; his mercy is not capricious, it is holy mercy; his justice is not corruptible, it is morally perfect. What a sublime mix of wonder and fear, comfort and joy, we begin to know when we consider God's infinite holiness!

Infinite Wisdom

Just as infinite holiness pervades all God's attributes, so does infinite wisdom. "Wisdom in scripture means choosing the best and noblest end at which to aim, along with the most appropriate and effective means to it."²

Every day we encounter situations and circumstances beyond our control that perplex us, confuse us, or frighten us. We are often left wondering, "What is happening? Where is this going?" If God's sovereign choices concerning me and my loved ones emerge not only from infinite moral goodness but are also guided by infinite wisdom, then I can rest and be at peace amid personal perplexity. Though I may not understand, God has chosen the most appropriate and effective means to achieve his good and holy purposes concerning me. So, I can trust that wisdom and his fatherly love. And you can too.

And So Much More

God is not just infinitely powerful, good, holy, and wise "out there" somewhere. He is all of these things with me. Because God is not bound by spatial location, wherever we are, we can always say to him, "No matter where I go, you are there; your hand shall lead me, your right hand shall hold me" (See Ps. 139:7-10).

Because he is the Triune God—an infinite fountain of being—we can say

2. J.I. PACKER, *CONCISE THEOLOGY* (WHEATON, IL: TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC., 1993), 48.

to him, "You are never distant, aloof, or disinterested in your creation; you are an unceasing river of interpersonal engagement, relationship, and love towards me."

Because He is exhaustively sovereign, ordaining all that exists and all that occurs in his creation, we can say to him, "I know you will accomplish your infinitely good and wise purposes concerning me—you have spoken and you will surely bring it to pass" (See Isa. 46:9-11).

So when those mornings come when you wish the day were over, let me encourage you to look beyond your day to the God who orders your days. Look beyond yourself to the God who made you, saved you, and sustains you. One of the best ways I know to do this is to study the doctrine of God. Study his infinite perfections and allow the doctrine of God to move you towards a deeper peace, a sweeter rest, and a more settled trust—perhaps especially if you're distressed and your soul is downcast.

Follow Spurgeon's wise advise and plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea. There you will find strength, refreshment, and comfort all the days of your life.

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