

# THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD

## THE MEANING OF GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE

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- This is one of God's incommunicable attributes...he doesn't share it with us
- God's immensity (unlimited by space) and omnipresence (present everywhere) are functions of his infinity (he is infinite in character, power, knowledge, time and space)
- "As eternity is the perfection whereby he hath neither beginning nor end, immutability is the perfection whereby he hath neither increase for diminution, so immensity or omnipresence is that whereby he hath neither bounds nor limitations."<sup>1</sup>
- God's omnipresence means that He is everywhere at all times
- He is infinite, with no spatial limits, and is at all times everywhere...he is at the same time present in every part of the universe
- Because God is a spiritual being, he does not experience spatial constraints and is not barred from any location...he does not have size or spatial dimensions
- We are not like this...we have spatial constraints and can't be in two places at once...if we are needed *here* then we cannot be *there*
- But since God occupies no space, there is no place in the created universe where God isn't present...he is not limited to a place as we are...he fills every place in creation...he is always everywhere
- There is not a corner on the backside of a galaxy billions of light years from us where God is excluded

**1 Kings 8:27** ~ But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!

**Isaiah 66:1** ~ Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?"

**Jeremiah 23:24** ~ "Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD.

- "[God] is not limited by place...[he] fills all, yes so as not to be contained in them, as wine and water is in a vessel. He is from the height of the heaven to the bottom of the deeps, in every point of the world, and in the whole circle of it, yet not limited by it, but beyond it."<sup>2</sup>
- Because God is immaterial, he is not physically present anywhere in space...but he is ontologically present everywhere in space
- "Ontological presence means that some entity or being is actually present at a given place in space. If the being is physical in nature, the being that is really there (ontological presence) will also be physically present. However, if the being is immaterial, then it can still actually be somewhere (ontological presence), but as immaterial it cannot be present physically. With this distinction, we can affirm that God is not present ontologically in just one place. This is so not because as immaterial he is present nowhere physically, but rather because, as immense, he is not limited to being present in just one place at a time. He is simultaneously everywhere ontologically."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, I:268.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., I:148.

<sup>3</sup> John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 250.

- Because God transcends spatial limitations, this means that God is present in every point of space with the fullness of his being
- God is not diffused through space so that only part of him is in each place; rather, he is fully present with his whole being in all places at once
- This immensity does not refer in any sense to physical size; rather, it signifies that his love, wrath, mercy, justice, knowledge, and so on, are fully present everywhere in creation and beyond
- It is not just that God is present physically or spatially in every location, but that his presence, by the virtue of him being God, is active in all those places such that all his attributes are present everywhere all the time
- This is significant because if God's attributes were at a distance from us, what help would that be?
- "It is not a piece of God is here and another parcel there, but God in his whole essence and perfections; in his wisdom to guide us, his power to protect and support us, his mercy to pity us, his fullness to refresh us, and his goodness to relieve us...If we are miserable, we have the presence of his goodness; if we want direction, we have the presence of his wisdom; if we are weak, we have the presence of his power."<sup>4</sup>
- Perhaps there is no greater passage to understand the omnipresence of God than Psalm 139
  - vv. 1-6 = God's omniscience
  - vv. 7-12 = God's omnipresence
  - vv. 13-18 = God's omnipotence
- The descriptions by David of God's omniscience in vv. 1-6 lead him into a description of God's omnipresence in vv. 7-12
- The thought of God's knowledge of him may have prompted David's desire to escape...it was almost too much for him to fathom...and so he may have wanted to remove himself from the all-searching eye of God
- That leads him into this incredible description of God's omnipresence

**Psalm 139:7** ~ Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

- David realizes that there is absolutely no place where he could escape from the presence of the Lord

**Psalm 139:8-9** ~ If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. 9 If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,

- David employs every direction on the compass to describe the infinitude of God's omnipresence
- He points to the north, the south, the east, and the west to indicate that there is no place where God isn't
- These verses encapsulate the comprehensive scope of God's presence

**Psalm 139:10-12** ~ Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," 12 Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.

- On the one hand David may have felt confined by the fact that God knows everything about him and that he is cannot escape his present
- On the other hand, this awareness of God's omnipresence was a great comfort to Him
- Another term used for omnipresence is "ubiquity" which means "equal whereness" or "the state or capacity of being everywhere, especially at the same time"
- When we say God is ubiquitous, we are saying that the fullness of his presence is located everywhere
- It is not as if the Lord's "head" is located on earth and his "foot" elsewhere in the universe (i.e. Ps 110:1)

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<sup>4</sup> Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, I:450.

- This is not pantheism which states that God is everything (i.e. a tree is God, a rock is God, etc.)
- His being is not identical with everything there is
- God is present *with* every point in space, but not *as* each point in space
- “It should be carefully noted that while God inhabits space he is not part of space. Neither our meeting rooms nor our chairs are a part of God...His presence may be likened to light or air, which fills a space but retains its own nature. The confusion of the Creator with the creation is the error of pantheism...where God is everything and everything is God...he is mysteriously above space, while being present in every part of the universe. This is what is meant by the omnipresence of God.”<sup>5</sup>

## THE COMPREHENSIVENESS OF GOD’S OMNIPRESENCE

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### He is Present in Heaven

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- God dwells in heaven which is the very abode and dwelling of God
- The God who extends through all time, space, infinity, and eternity cannot be confined or limited to buildings made with human hands

**Isaiah 6:1, 3** ~ In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple...3 And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.”

**Psalms 11:4** ~ The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD’S throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men

**Psalms 123:1** ~ To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens!

**Isaiah 57:15** ~ For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell *on* a high and holy place

**Ezekiel 1:1, 27-28** ~ Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth *day* of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God...27 Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and *there was* a radiance around Him. 28 As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

- This is what makes heaven so wonderful...not the streets of gold, the pearly gates, or the foundations made of jewels...it is that all of heaven is permeated with the presence of God

### He is Present on Earth

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- This is God’s immanent presence, namely his presence within His creation...he is present in all of creation, while remaining distinct from it (transcendent)
- God guides, governs, and provides for his creation even though he is so far above it

**Deuteronomy 4:39** ~ Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.

**Psalms 23:4** ~ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

**Matthew 28:19-20** ~ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

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<sup>5</sup> Terry Johnson, *The Identity and Attributes of God*, 74.

**Acts 18:9-10** ~ And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”

- That is great news for us that we have a God who is with us, present on the earth where we can easily access him rather than being far from us

## He is Present in Hell

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- In one sense, hell is the separation from God’s presence...namely, separation from his love, grace, mercy

**Matthew 7:23** ~ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’

**Matthew 25:41** ~ Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels

**2 Thessalonians 1:9** ~ And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power

- The wicked are shut out from God’s gracious presence, but they must dwell forever in the first of his wrathful presence
- Whereas heaven is the place where God is present to bless, hell is the place where God is present to punish
- God is present in hell in the fullness of his wrath and indignation

**Revelation 14:9-10** ~ Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb

- John indicates that those in hell will be “in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb”
- Those who are in hell experience God’s wrath and punishment in his very presence
- Thus, hell is ruled by God and is in the very presence of God
- “[It is not] as though the ungodly see God and his appearance as the godly will see Him; but they will feel the power of his presence, which they will not be able to bear, and yet will be forced to bear.”<sup>6</sup>
- “God hath a presence of glory in heaven, whereby he comforts the saints; a presence of wrath in hell, whereby he torments the damned.”<sup>7</sup>
- “God is in heaven in regard of the manifestation of his glory, in hell by the expression of his justice; in earth, by the discoveries of his wisdom, power, patience, and compassion; in his people, by the monuments of his grace; and in all, in regard of his substance...He fills hell with severity, heaven with his glory, his people with his grace.”<sup>8</sup>
- By the way, this teaches us that Satan is not the ruler of hell

**Matthew 25:41** ~ Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.’

**Revelation 20:10** ~ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther

<sup>7</sup> Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, I:426.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, I:440, 451.

- Instead of reigning over hell, Satan will suffer the worst punishment there

## THE QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE

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### What About Passages Which Speak of God Being in a Specific Place?

- How can God come to/leave from a place where he is already present? → this is usually anthropomorphic language for God's special presence and activity and does not mean God moves from one place to another

**Genesis 11:5** ~ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

**1 Samuel 16:14** ~ Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.

**Psalms 2:4** ~ He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.

**Psalms 26:8** ~ O LORD, I love the habitation of Your house And the place where Your glory dwells.

**Psalms 48:1** ~ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, In the city of our God, His holy mountain.

**Proverbs 15:29** ~ The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

**Zechariah 8:3** ~ "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.'

**Ephesians 2:17** ~ AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;

**1 John 4:15** ~ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

- These passages are probably best understood as referring to a special manifestation of God for a special purpose...he is everywhere in his essence but only in certain places relationally
- "None of these descriptions should be understood as speaking of God's essence; rather they speak of manifestations of his presence. His essence is present everywhere, but he manifests that presence differently according to his purposes...None of what we are affirming of God's universal presence denies his special presence, or peculiar presence...He is generally present to all, yet, explains Muller, 'he is present graciously and specially only to some.'"<sup>9</sup>

### How Can God be Present in Places Where Evil is Committed?

- True, God is not present as a participant in those sins and is not tempted by observing them
- He is no more contaminated by sin than the sunlight is contaminated when it shines on mud

**James 1:13** ~ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

- But he is present in his righteousness and wrath against such wickedness
- And he uses such evil to accomplish his loving purposes

**Genesis 50:20** ~ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, *Identity and Attributes of God*, 76.

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

## How is Christ Omnipresent?

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- Since Jesus has ascended and no longer walks among us in the flesh, how can it also be true that He is with us?

**Matthew 18:20** ~ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

**Matthew 28:20** ~ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

- Christ is both truly human and divine (hypostatic union)...he has a divine nature that possesses all of God’s attributes...and he has a human nature that possesses everything that makes human beings human
- These two natures are perfectly united without any mixture, confusion, separation, or division
- Thus, Christ’s physical body do not become omnipresent because they are united to his deity; likewise, Christ’s deity does not cease to be omnipresent simply because it is united to a human nature
- As a result, Christ’s divine nature makes him always present with us
- Even though his human nature is in heaven, his divine nature is not limited to the physical confines of his body and so it retains its property of omnipresence
- The person of Christ can be everywhere today but that ability is through the power of the divine nature, not the human nature

## THE IMPLICATIONS OF GOD’S OMNIPRESENCE

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### Caution

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- God’s omnipresence should serve as a caution and grave warning to anyone who thinks they can hide from God and sin with impunity
- It should be unnerving to the unbeliever to know that everything they do and everywhere they go, God is there and knows
- There is no escape, no way out, no place to hide since God un.masks everything by his presence everywhere

**Job 34:21-22** ~ For His eyes are upon the ways of a man, And He sees all his steps. 22 There is no darkness or deep shadow Where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.

**Psalms 21:8** ~ Your hand will find out all your enemies; Your right hand will find out those who hate you.

**Proverbs 5:21** ~ For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths.

**Proverbs 15:3** ~ The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.

**Jeremiah 16:17** ~ For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes.

**Hebrews 4:13** ~ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do

- Those who oppose God can never flee from him since everything is seen by him and nothing is hidden from his sight
- A man may hide God from himself, and yet he cannot hide himself from God

## Communion

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- One of the greatest implications of God's omnipresence as a believer is that we can enjoy unbroken communion with him anywhere and anytime...we can commune with him wherever we go

**Acts 17:24-25, 27** ~ The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things...they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us

- The sphere of our communion with him is unlimited because God is everywhere at all times
- As such, our communion with him must not be restricted to a certain place and time
- We can enjoy constant communion and fellowship with him, engaging in continual prayer and thanksgiving

## Comfort

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- God is never far off even if it feels like it...no matter what trouble or hardship we find ourselves in
- He is near to the brokenhearted so we can pour out our hearts to him wherever we are

**Genesis 39:2-3, 21, 22** ~ **The LORD was with Joseph**, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. 3 Now his master saw **that the LORD was with him** and *how* the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand...21 But **the LORD was with Joseph** and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer...22 The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because **the LORD was with him**; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper

**Exodus 3:12** ~ And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."

**Psalms 23:4** ~ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

**Psalms 46:1** ~ God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

**Acts 17:27** ~ ...he is not far from each of us

**Hebrews 13:5** ~ *Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"

- The doctrine of God's omnipresence offers tremendous encouragement since he is as close to us at all times as we are to ourselves
- He is committed to his people and is with them in the midst of trial and adversity

## Courage

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- We do not need to fear whatever troubles, opposition, or persecution we might face
- Too often we allow earthly fears to control us because we don't soak our minds in the reality of God's omniscience
- Whatever dangers we face, we can be confident that God is there with us

**Isaiah 41:10** ~ Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.

- On May 28, 1968, during the height of the Vietnam War, Roger Ingvalson took off in his F-105 from a base in Thailand on his 87<sup>th</sup> combat sortie to destroy a bridge in North Vietnam
- As he pulled off the target, an air controller requested that he hit an enemy truck convoy nearby
- He located the convoy of Soviet-built trucks near Dong Hoi and rolled in at more than 500 knots
- At 50 feet above the hard deck, he fired a long 20mm burst into the convoy
- Moments later, he recalls, "I heard and felt an explosion and my cockpit immediately filled with smoke. I hit the afterburner to gain altitude, then pulled the canopy ejection handle to get rid of the smoke. I rocketed up to about 600 feet before my aircraft went into an uncontrollable roll. I pulled the ejection seat handle and squeezed the trigger. As I was catapulted out of the burning aircraft, the wind blast knocked me out, and I didn't regain consciousness until just prior to landing on a dried out rice paddy."
- He was captured by the North Vietnamese and for the next 1,742 days, he endured torture, starvation, desolation, disease and one stretch of 20 months in strict solitary confinement, much of that spent in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton"
- When asked how he survived the extended period of solitary confinement, he said, "I had the wonderful feeling that I was really pulling one over on the Vietnamese. They thought I was in there and really suffering by being alone. [But] I had a cellmate the entire time I was there. And that was the Lord Jesus Christ."

## Consecration

- God's omnipresence is a powerful motivator to holiness, knowing that he is always present and that everything we do is performed before the face of God

**Job 31:4** ~ Does He not see my ways And number all my steps?

**Psalms 33:13-15** ~ The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men; 14 From His dwelling place He looks out On all the inhabitants of the earth, 15 He who fashions the hearts of them all, He who understands all their works

- Godly living is a matter of living in the light of God's presence, knowing that when we sin it is done in the presence of God
- Understanding the omnipresence of God should be a great shield against temptation
- "[Our conduct should] be always as in his sight and under his eye, with all gravity and seriousness, with all reverence and submission, with all purity and holiness."<sup>10</sup>
- "RESOLVE NEVER TO FORGET THE EYE OF GOD. - The eye of God! Think of that. Everywhere, in every house, in every field, in every room, in every company, alone or in a crowd, the eye of God is always on you... Endeavor, I beg you, to realize this fact. Remember that you have to deal with an all-seeing God, a God who never sleeps, a God who understands your thoughts, and with whom the night shines as the day. You may leave your father's house, and go away, like the prodigal, into a far country, and think that there is nobody to watch your conduct; but the eye and ear of God are there before you. You may deceive your parents or employers, you may tell them lies, and act one way before their faces, and another behind their backs, but you cannot deceive God. He knows you through and through. He heard what you said as you came here today. He knows what you are thinking of at this minute. He has set your most secret sins in the light of His countenance, and they will one day come out before the world to your shame, except you take heed. How little is this really felt! How many things are done continually, which men would never do if they thought they were seen! How many matters are transacted in the rooms of imagination, which would never bear the light of day! Yes, men entertain thoughts in private, and say words in private, and do acts in private, which they would be ashamed and blush to have exposed before the world. The sound of a footstep coming has stopped many a deed of wickedness. A knock at the door has caused many an evil work to be hastily suspended, and hurriedly laid aside. But oh, what miserable folly is all this! There is an all-seeing Witness with us wherever we go. Lock the door, pull down the blind, turn out the light; it doesn't matter, it makes no difference; God is everywhere, you cannot shut Him out, or prevent His seeing."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel Hopkins, quoted in Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, I:655.

<sup>11</sup> JC Ryle, *Thoughts for Young Men*, 51.