

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOD
The Attributes of God
Banska Bystrica, 28th October 2018

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| τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς δόξης τοῦ μακαρίου θεοῦ | 1Tim 1:11 ...the gospel of the glory of the blessed God... |
| ὁ μακάριος καὶ μόνος δυνάστης, | 1Tim 6:15 ...the <u>blessed</u> and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords |
| ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν, | 1Tim 6:16 ...who alone has immortality, who dwells in <u>unapproachable</u> light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. |

OUTLINE

0. INTRODUCTION

- 0.1. A DANGEROUS METHOD
- 0.2. SOME DANGERS OF HIGH TOPICS
- 0.3. THE WORDS

1. BLESSEDNESS OF DIVINE BEING

- 1.1. BEING AS POSITIVE QUALITY
- 1.2. THE INDEPENDENCE OF GOD (ASEITAS)
- 1.3. ABSOLUTE FREEDOM OF BEING

2. BLESSEDNESS OF DIVINE ACTIVITY

- 2.1. SELF-GIVING
- 2.2. SELF-SACRIFICING
- 2.3. SELF-COMMUNICATION

3. BLESSEDNESS OF DIVINE THOUGHTS

- 3.1. DIVINE IMAGINATION
- 3.2. DIVINE PLANS

4. TO REMEMBER

0. INTRODUCTION

0.1. THE WORDS

- Hebrew (תְּהַלֵּל) – filled w. power; (God) **be praised**:
- Greek (μακάριος) – *fortunate, happy* usually in the sense of *privileged recipient of divine favor*; Of God as the source of all benefaction

0.2. A DANGEROUS METHOD

- thinking “backwards” → from the *imago dei* towards *deus*...
- the image of “happiness” is probably the most distorted part of the original *imago dei* in us...
- John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism:

Diary 1854: The only true or definite rule of conduct or standard of morality is the greatest happiness, but there is needed first a philosophical estimate of happiness. Quality as well as quantity of happiness

is to be considered; less of a higher kind is preferable to more of a lower. The test of quality is the preference given by those who are acquainted with both. Socrates would rather choose to be Socrates dissatisfied than to be a pig satisfied. The pig probably would not, but then the pig knows only one side of the question: Socrates knows both.

- John PIPER: Christian Hedonism (Forgive the Label, But Don't Miss the Truth)¹

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Or: The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever.

- We must not forget, that
- BAVINCK *Reformed Dogmatics* (abridged)

[p. 177] God is the One who exists of and through himself, the perfect being who is absolute in wisdom and goodness, righteousness and holiness, power and blessedness. God is absolute, that is, independent being, existing only to himself. "Absolute is that which is not dependent on anything else."¹⁴ This conviction is the clear teaching of Holy Scripture. From everlasting to everlasting he is God, the First and the Last, from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Gen. 1:1ff.; Pss. 33:6, 9; 90:2; Isa. 41:4; 43:10–13; 44:6; 48:12; John 5:26; Acts 17:24ff.; Rom. 11:36; Eph. 4:6; Heb. 2:10; Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8, 11; 10:6; 11:17; etc.). [p. 204] He has no goal outside himself but is self-sufficient, all-sufficient (Ps. 50:8ff.; Isa. 40:28ff.; Hab. 2:20). It is fitting to use the term "blessedness" here. Blessedness, in the tradition of ARISTOTLE, involves a unity of thinking and thought (thinking and its object coincide in him) as well as not being subject to striving and craving. God is the Blessed One because he is at rest in the plenitude of his perfections. When God loves others, he loves himself in them; he is blessed in himself as the sum of all goodness, of all perfection.

0.3. SOME DANGERS OF HIGH TOPICS

- tragedy → may be close to *comedy*...
- noble → may be close to *ridiculous*...
- worship → may be close to *blasphemy*...
- Greek philosophy: → *impassibilitas*...

R.C. Sproul: Sometimes the impassibility of God is expressed philosophically in such a way as to describe God as being utterly incapable of feeling. In a desire to protect the immutability of God and to free Him from all passions that would be dependent upon the actions of the creature and to insure the constant and abiding state of pure and total felicity in God, the accent falls on His being feeling-less. This robs God of His personal character and reduces Him to an impersonal force or blob of cosmic energy.²

- ...the testimony of the biblical narrative definitely stands at odds with the spirit of Greek philosophy. In Greek thinking, immortality, the absence of emotion and its accompanying impassibility (apathy), all belong to being itself.³
- Wikipedia: The **beatific vision** (*visio beatifica*) is the ultimate direct self-communication of God to the individual person. A person possessing the beatific vision reaches, as a member of redeemed humanity in the communion of saints, perfect salvation in its entirety, i.e. heaven.

1. BLESSEDNESS OF DIVINE BEING

1.1. BEING AS POSITIVE QUALITY

- the problem of *being* as an attribute...
- AUGUSTINE "if something were deprived of *all* goodness, it would be altogether nothing; therefore as long as something *is*, it is good" (*Confessions*, VII.12)
- Aquinas thinks that existence and goodness have the same referent (IEP)
- **Gn 1:31** And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/christian-hedonism> (January 1, 1995)

² <https://www.monergism.com/divine-impassibility>

³ https://repository.divinity.edu.au/1041/1/LTJ_45-3_Dec11_Silcock.pdf

1.2. THE INDEPENDENCE OF GOD (ASEITAS)

- **Ps 50:9-11** I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. ¹⁰ For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine

1.3. ABSOLUTE FREEDOM OF BEING

- **Ex 3:14** God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you. (אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֲלֵיכֶם)
- Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics II.1, part 1 of §28* "The being of God as One who loves in freedom," – God is conditioned only by God's "own choosing and deciding, willing and doing" (Barth 301, 338).⁴

2. BLESSEDNESS OF DIVINE ACTIVITY

- blessedness of loving → **1John 4:8, 16** God is love.

2.1. SELF-GIVING

- The Trinity (περιχώρησις)⁵ → the church (κοινωνία) → togetherness, unity:
- **John 17:22-23** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one,
- **1John 1:3-4** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete (ὅνα ἡ χαρὰ ἡμῶν ἦ πεπληρωμένη).

2.2. SELF-SACRIFICING

- **Ps 68:19** Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up (בְּרוּךְ אֲדֹנָי יוֹם יוֹם וַיַּמְסְכֵנו); God is our salvation
- the Cross → **Heb 12:2** Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God

2.3. SELF-COMMUNICATION

- truthfulness; light; openness; joy of sharing...
- **Ps 119:12** Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes!
- **1John 1:5** God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

3. BLESSEDNESS OF DIVINE THOUGHTS

- **Ps 92:5** How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep (מָאֵד עֲמֻקּוֹ מִחֻשְׁבֹתֶיךָ)!

3.1. DIVINE IMAGINATION

- **Isaiah 55:8-9** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts

3.2. DIVINE PLANS

- **Ps 33:11** The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations (עֲצַת יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תַּעֲמֹד מִחֻשְׁבוֹת לְבוֹ לְדוֹר וָדוֹר)

⁴ <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/93352>

⁵ Wikipedia: Perichoresis (from Greek: περιχώρησις perikhōrēsis, "rotation") is a term referring to the relationship of the three persons of the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) to one another. Circumincession is a Latin-derived term for the same concept.

4. TO REMEMBER

- The idea of blessedness of God is inevitably closely bound with our ideal of the ultimate happiness.
- Before we think and talk about blessedness of God we must accept and understand the critical differences in being (existence) and in accessibility (ethics) of the ideal of the divine blessedness between humans and God.
- Our highest aspirations in life and joy are fully sharing in God's blessedness through Jesus Christ.