

Image And Likeness Of God (Part 5)

Conclusion of Series

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We are now well into the subject of God's omnipresence. *Omni* is a prefix that has come into the English language from the Greek and it simply means "*all*"—all presence of God. The subject here is the all presence of God.

God can be present everywhere, but He is not omnibody. He is not "all body" everywhere. He is Himself in one place at one time, even as we are. We are where we are at any given moment, and so is He.

The Bible shows Him doing activities in various locations, and usually that location is in heaven. Jesus made the statement, "*Pray to our Father which is in heaven*" (Luke 11:2; Matthew 6:9). Jesus specified that as a location from which God operates most of the time.

How, then, can God be omnipresent if He is one place at one time? How can He be everywhere? Again, the Bible shows that He uses the same basic methods as we do in how to be, you might say, in more than one place at one time. We are in His image even in this area.

The first one that we were concentrating on is that we carry His presence with us wherever we go because we are in union with Him. In terms of God's omnipresence it is perhaps the least important aspect. But in terms of our becoming in His character image, it's probably the most important of all of the elements.

Presence is dependent upon a relationship (that is a union) that is built upon knowledge, experiences together, fellowship, and memory. The major negative factor is that God is not the only one with whom we can have union with, and it is here that we need to be careful.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience [Notice the word "*spirit*." God is Spirit. Here we're dealing with another spirit, and it is talking about a personality. It's the spirit who works in the sons of disobedience], among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh

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and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Before our calling Satan controlled us because we were in union with him. We were in harmony with him. We were in agreement with him. And do you know what? Because of this, we gave to him the right to control us.

Now certainly we were deceived. Certainly we did not know any better. But he had us in the family name (I'm trying to make a parallel here), because when we are baptized, we are baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But before that time we were in Satan's name. Just as a scriptural reinforcement of this, think of John 8:44 where Jesus, speaking to the unconverted Jews, said very clearly that, "*You are of your father the devil.*"

They carried about the family name of Satan the Devil because they were in union with him, and Jesus said because of this, "*My word, the word that I speak to you, has no place in you.*" because they/we had given our allegiance to Satan the Devil. We were in union with him. We had a relationship with him, and that relationship was so close that Jesus described it as a family relationship and Satan was our father.

This combination of verses out of Ephesians 2 and John 8 help us to understand a principle of government—that mankind allows itself to be governed. Do you know what governed means? It means, "*to be managed, to be controlled, largely to the extent of oneness with each other.*"

Now this is not wrong. It is a right principle, but like everything else in life, it is something that can be abused. The way of the world, that which comes from Satan, is usually to compete and to take, to grab control. Satan seizes control stealthily by means of deception and he is so adept at it that we are unaware that we are willingly giving him control until God makes us aware through His revelation of Himself.

So complete is this control that we give to Satan the Devil that we are actually considered in the Bible as being his slave. A slave is a person who has no choices. The bondage to Satan is largely broken through God's revelation of Himself, and the resulting faith that we have in Him which enables us to be free to choose obedience to Him, rather than continuing to submit unknowingly to Satan, and thus the relationship with God begins a union with Him.

God could beat us into submission and we would follow out of terror, but what He wants is control of our lives because we agree with His truth and are, thus, in union with Him

and His purpose, and we give Him control in order that He might shape us to His end. This requires a relationship during which we get to know Him—to know Him, to trust Him, to believe Him ever more deeply. He already knows us far better than we know ourselves and He already has the love to overcome any differences. But we do not. So He desires a relationship, and thus He institutes one. As the relationship grows, God's presence in our lives becomes greater.

This is why Jesus made the statement that "eternal life is to know God." This also helps to explain why those who do not love the truth are going to perish. A person who really is in union with the true God is going to make every effort to preserve and strengthen that union through submission to Him.

People who do not know God seldom, if ever, are aware of His presence because there is nothing on which to base a presence. There is no relationship. The greater the true knowledge of God, the stronger the presence, just as surely as the better a marriage and family life, the more sure that we are going to be in each other's thoughts regardless of the distance from each other, because we will carry with us the memories of experiences.

Titus 1:13-16 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God [Now begin thinking about this statement in relation to the world. There are an awful lot of people in the world who say they know God. There are an awful lot of people who think that they are aware of God], but in works they deny Him [Is commandment keeping important?] being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

People may claim to know God. They may claim to have His presence in their lives, but if they are not obeying Him, that claim is false. I bring this up because of what is going on inside of the Worldwide Church of God, because they are now preaching, saying openly, that there are people in other organizations, not of the Church of God, and they are claiming that these people are sons of God, that they have the Spirit of God. Yet these people are not obeying God in major portions of the commands of God. And if they are not obeying major portions of the commands of God, how can they possibly have a relationship with Him, because they are not doing what He says to do?

The claim is false and these people are deceived because obedience to His commandments is a major factor in having a relationship and, thus, oneness with Him. If we're not doing the same things God is doing, how can we be one with Him? We do not have the presence of people that we have never met, and the reason is because there is no basis for a relationship. Therefore, there is no basis for presence. And thus it is with God. The greater our knowledge of Him, both intellectual and experiential, and the greater our consecration to Him, our devotion to Him which motivates us to make the relationship work, the stronger His presence to us, because as these things increase, so does faith. With that in mind, let's go back to a Psalm of David, which says:

Psalm 139:1-14 O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. [Think of this in terms of omnipresence.] You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me; and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You. For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.

This Psalm has two aspects that impact upon omnipresence. We'll begin in verse 14—"and that my soul knows very well." Right in this Psalm David had a good relationship with God. He really did know God, and so wherever David went, David carried God's presence with him on the basis of that relationship.

Most of the Psalm covers aspects of the other aspect of God's omnipresence and it's an important one and that is that God is able to project Himself into a situation and act should He care to do so. Now the question is, how is He able to do this? To answer to this second aspect, we'll turn to the scriptures and believe what they say as to how He collects information.

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Genesis 6:5-7 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

A simple verb, the Lord "saw." Now connect this with the other sermon about how God has bodily parts. He has eyes. He has ears, and He uses them. He saw it with His own eyes, regardless of where He was, whether He was in heaven or whether He was on the earth. God saw.

Genesis 11:5-7 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

The Lord saw. The Lord came down personally. The wording is such that it indicates that He had heard reports and decided to investigate Himself. Are you beginning to see something develop here? Does God use the same general methods that human beings do to gather information? He most certainly does.

Genesis 18:20-21 And the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know."

How plain does it have to get? God gathers information the way we do—firsthand. We know from chapter 19 that the angels literally went into Sodom and Gomorrah, did they not? The Bible says that about the angels. It also says basically the same thing about God out of His own mouth, "*I will go there Myself and then I'll know it.*" Are we going to believe it about the angels and not believe it about God?

What kind of a God is that that does confusing things and says, "*Well, this applies to them, but it doesn't apply to me when I say the same thing about Myself that I say about*

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them?" He went there Himself to check up on the outcry that was given to Him by others. That's pretty clear. Let's go to II Chronicles. This is a favorite verse of mine. I think about this often.

II Chronicles 16:9 "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars."

God is watching. He manages His creation. He governs it. He's not a stone monument that is up there doing nothing but thinking. He is actively involved in what He is doing. His eyes scan the earth.

Job 24:23 He gives them security, and they rely on it; yet His eyes are on their ways.

God has a body. That body has parts. He uses those parts. He watches. He is not kidding. Can we, in simple faith, believe that He means what He says?

Psalms 7:9 Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just; for the righteous God tests the hearts and minds.

Here we enter into something very interesting. Remember what we're exploring here is how does God get information? How does God get knowledge? God tests the hearts and the minds. God creates circumstances and He puts people to the test.

In a sermonette by John Reid one of the verses he used was in I Peter 2:12 where Peter speaks about people glorifying God in the day of visitation. John explained how this visitation means "*inspection*," that is, their inspection by God. Now why does anybody inspect something? Because they want to find out.

When you go to buy a car, you inspect it. You evaluate it. You look at the tires. You look at the engine. You look at the oil. You look at the seats. You look at the general condition of the body. You are inspecting it. You are evaluating it. You test it in order to find out what it will do so you can decide whether to buy it or not.

You do that with clothing. You do that with a house. You do that with a major portion of

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life. You are gathering information so that you will know what to do with your life. God inspects. Now do you understand what that means, what the ramifications of that are? He doesn't know. Think about that awhile. So God puts people to the test and He watches.

Psalm 44:21 Would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart.

The first phrase is the one that we're concentrating on here yet. God searches things out. You do research to find things out. You look in dictionaries. You look in encyclopedias and commentaries. You look at recipe books. You look at all kinds of things. You search them out.

God does the same thing; only His business (if I can put it that way) is to create character in His image. But He has to search people out in order to find out what's in them—what they're going to do under certain circumstances. He inspects us and puts us to the test.

Proverbs 24:12 If you say, "Surely we did not know this," does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? [You weigh things on the scale for what reason? What's the purpose? You want to discover how much it weighs, how much is there.] He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?

How does God know how to render to each man according to His deeds? He has to inspect. He has to test. He has to evaluate. He has to find out. Now please don't detach this from omnipresence. Even though God might be located at one place at one time, He goes from place to place in order to gather information, in order to test, in order to see for Himself what is going on.

There is a tendency in all of us to think that everything in God's creation just works automatically. No, God governs. He is managing His universe. He is creating a product and He is serious about what He is doing.

I Thessalonians 2:4-5 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness; God is witness.

There are two things there, one that applies directly to you and me. This was written to Christians. God tests our hearts. He wants to know. He wants to find out through the circumstances that He creates or allows to occur. He wants to see for Himself what our reaction is going to be. He does not assume. He does not presume that He already knows. God tests and He is watching. That's why He can be a witness. But there is another aspect to this watching part.

Daniel 10:2-3, 12 In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. Then he [in this case it's the angel Gabriel] said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words."

This is what motivated Gabriel to respond because Daniel cried out to God.

Daniel 10:20-21 Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince."

Now you're beginning to see where I am headed here and that is that the Bible establishes very clearly that there is an angelic host to whom responsibilities and authority have been delegated by God. So Gabriel came because of the appeal of Daniel. He responded to Daniel's prayer.

He came to Daniel's aid but he was withheld from coming to Daniel immediately because he met resistance from another great being until finally he had to receive help from a third great being named here Michael, and Michael is identified as "your prince." He didn't mean Daniel's prince in this case. He meant Israel's prince. We see an angelic being whose authority is over (or his responsibility is to God in behalf of) the children of Israel.

Daniel 12:1 "At that time Michael shall stand up [meaning he's getting into a position to work, or to undergo some kind of an activity], the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people."

That's very clear. God has delegated responsibility to angelic beings. Do you understand the significance of that? He has not scripted everything out, and that every one of these beings, these personages (angelic), are required to report to God from time to time about what is going on. Let's go to the book of Zechariah and continue to develop this, and it gets very personal.

Zechariah 1:7-11 On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet: I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and behind him were horses: red, sorrel, and white. Then I said, "My lord, what are these?" So the angel who talked with me said to me, "I will show you what they are." And the man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These are the ones whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth." So they answered the Angel of the Lord, who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, "We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly."

They are reporting. How does God gather information? It's beginning to become clear.

Zechariah 6:1-8 Then I turned and raised my eyes and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze. With the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses, with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot dappled horses; strong steeds. Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" And the angel answered and said to me, "These are four spirits of heaven, who go out from their station before the Lord of all the earth. [What does a station indicate? A place of residence, a place of work, a place of responsibility.] The one with the black horses is going to the north country, the white are going after them, and the dappled are going toward the south country." Then the strong steeds went out, eager to go, that they might walk to and fro throughout the earth. And He said, "Go, walk to and fro throughout the earth." So they walked to and fro throughout the earth. And He called to me, and spoke to me, saying, "See, those who go toward the north country have given rest to My Spirit in the north country."

They exercised their authority and the result was peace. They calmed things down concerning what was going on. These scriptures are obviously showing these angels carrying out delegated responsibilities and there was a requirement for them to report from time to time. Let's go back into the New Testament again. This one is so encouraging. Jesus is the speaker.

Matthew 18:10-11 "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."

Did you notice that it didn't even, in this case, say angel? It was plural—angels who report to God. Now that's what "*they see the face of God*" means—that they stand before Him, that they are in communication with Him, that they are giving reports to Him, that they are analyzing and giving evaluations to Him. Can I go any further? I think so. They are telling Him what our needs are.

What is the purpose of these angels? Obviously their purpose as assigned by God is to ensure that we have every opportunity to grow to the greatest extent possible that God might save us with as great a growth as possible.

There's a very interesting illustration in Acts 12. This occurred when Peter was thrown into prison and then he was released and went to the brethren's home.

Acts 12:13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer.

I kind of have a warm spot in my heart for Rhoda. I don't know how old she was. We can figure she was twelve, fourteen, sixteen years old, maybe a little bit excitable, but she knew what was going on, or at least she had an overview of what was going on. She went to the gate undoubtedly just expecting a friend of some kind, but what met her eyes was something that she did not expect.

Acts 12:14-15 When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel."

We can let our minds ramble on that a little while. Do we have an angel that looks somewhat like us? I don't know. It's a possibility. But it certainly gives an insight into the beliefs of these people who had contact with Jesus, who had contact with the very first group that Jesus taught, and those people certainly believed that we had angels around us. We might even go to the place where we say that God has angels swarming around us, delegated to watch over us and maybe one of them has been given the assignment to watch over our lives personally, and that we are his responsibility.

Tie that together with Matthew 18 with what Jesus said and you cannot come to any other conclusion. How does God accomplish what He does? Well, one of the ways is that He delegates and He has others who are assisting Him in the managing, in the governing, in the carrying out of His great purpose.

We see here that there is an angelic kingdom (I guess you might say) invisible, very powerful, answerable directly to God, in helping Him carry out His purpose. I think it begins to become apparent that God does not take care of every last detail of the operations of His vast creation. His agents help Him and they are found in every part of His universe.

An additional ramification of this is it becomes apparent that God has not predestined every last act all down through history from eternity. If it were that God did that, then free moral agency is a joke. There really is no such thing. Is God playing a game? No, free moral agency is a reality and God does not know what we are going to do. I do not say that He does not have a good idea of what we're going to do, but He does not assume. He does not presume. He wants to find out for sure.

I'm going to carry this one step further because there are some scriptures that give an indication that there are things that never even came to God's mind. That's an astounding thought, but I'm going to show them to you. Perhaps this will help us to understand the purity of God's thinking. I mean it's astounding.

Jeremiah 19:5 They have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or speak, nor did it come into My mind.

Something so abominable, so vile, so awful, so evil, that He did not picture those who had made the covenant with Him and had His law would ever turn to such a thing, to

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throw their own living children into a raging fire as an offering, supposedly, to Him. Turn to chapter 32, just in case you think that He was kidding.

I once heard Mr. Armstrong say something and after he said it, my thought to myself was, "*Wow! How could anybody be that pure?*" What he said was that if we happened to be walking along the street and we found somebody's wallet, and it had a good bit of money in it, the thought should not even come into our minds to steal that thing. The thought would probably go through my mind. I may put it out of my mind, and that would certainly be the right thing to do. But I know my thought at the time was, "*How can anybody's character, heart, be that pure that the thought of stealing it or taking it or using it for myself would never even come to mind?*"

That's the thing these verses are talking about, that it never came to His mind that His people would do anything that vile.

Jeremiah 32:35 And they built the high places of Baal which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

The same thought is expressed (not in words, but the implication of what is said there) in Genesis 6:5-7 when it says that it repented the Lord that He had made man to live on the earth. It never came into His mind that people could get so wretched, where every imagination, every thought that came to mind was only evil continually. The only thing that He could think to do to save these people for the time of their visitation would be to wipe them out before their minds became so abominably corrupted, their conscience was so defiled, their character so set, their heart, their mind, their spirit so evil that repentance would be impossible. The only thing to do would be to put them to death, to sanctify them, to set them apart for a time when they would have an opportunity, and those kind of temptations that were in the world at that time wouldn't even be there.

Genesis 22:12 And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

Is God kidding? Is He playing loose with the truth? Or, was He not really sure until then. "*Now I know.*"

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The same kind of thinking is expressed in Deuteronomy 8 where He says that God gave them tests, that He allowed them to go hungry, that He gave them manna that they might learn to live by every word of God. The implication of that is that He didn't know what the children of Israel's reaction would be and He wanted to find out and He did it so that things would be better at the latter end. But He had to find out the same way we do—test, evaluate, inspect, and watch carefully.

Isaiah 59:15-16a So truth fails, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor...

It boggled His mind. Do you know what an intercessor is? It's somebody who intercedes. It's somebody who goes in and speaks for, or takes care of, or provides for in a dispute. And God wondered that there was no intercessor.

Isaiah 59:16b-19 ...therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; the coastlands He will fully repay. So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.

That's written so that we will understand that He never thought that things would get like this. So God took things into His own hands to deliver His people. Brethren, I didn't know until recently that there are 6,468 commands in the Bible given to regulate man so as to set forth our responsibilities in God's great plan. Now if God has everything planned out, there is not any reason to even give commands. Giving commands create choices of whether to do or not do.

There are 1,260 promises of blessings or rewards, curses or loss of reward. Do you see what those promises do? They set up choices, and these things are conditional depending on whether one obeys or disobeys. If God already knew, or had it already been foreordained, the giving of conditions and promises makes no sense. God doesn't know.

There are hundreds of warnings and there are 1,522 "if's." Do you know what an "if" does? If you will do this—it sets up a conditional requirement. Are these not sufficient proofs that even though God is omniscient and omnipotent, that He does not cause all acts and events by His decrees? Does that not show that He changes in His dealings with men as they conform, or refuse to conform to His will? God does not know from all eternity what any one person will do under various circumstances and that is why the instructions, the conditional statements, and the tests.

God's eternal plan is known from the beginning. That's what it says in Acts 15. That what He plans to do on the earth He has the power to do. But concerning free moral agents, He does not know from all eternity what they will do before they have their existence and they have a part in His plan.

He has a plan to save all. He says that He is not willing that any should perish. And for those who willfully rebel, He has predestined punishments. Those things are there. He has the power and it is His will. But it is left up to each person to choose his own destiny. If a person does not choose to be saved, that is his responsibility.

What that does is it gives you and me and everybody the power to resist even God. We have the power to resist Satan. We have the power to resist his demons. No one has to yield to evil impulses. No one.

What we are doing here is we are gathering together all sorts of aspects of God's nature. We are in His image as to form and shape. We are in His image in terms of intellectual power. We can set our will. We have choices to make. We can come to knowledge. We can choose to fellowship with God, or choose to fellowship with Satan. We can choose to fellowship with those of like minds, or we can choose to fellowship with the world.

God has made a choice and that is He has made the choice not to know what we will do. God is Almighty and God is omnipotent, but He has limited Himself in His dealings with free moral agents, and He has done that because He respects our willpower, our absolute right to act on our own choices as to whether we will conform, as to whether we will consecrate ourselves to the very highest good—His purpose, His plan.

Brethren, learn this. He will not allow us to escape our responsibility to Him because He must know. And if we choose not to choose, that's the same as saying, "*No, I will not conform to You.*" But He's got to know. He's got to know in the day of our testing. Judgment is now on the house of God.

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There are many areas that God has limited Himself in. Some of these are direct statements. For example in Hebrews 6:17-19, God has set Himself not to lie. I'm sure it doesn't come to mind, that He is so pure that it states that directly, and it does that for our benefit. It's very important that it is stated directly because this is the basis of our faith—an unchanging God whose word is absolutely good.

You contrast that to mankind. We cannot, it seems, stay on the course for very long and very straightly. We blow hot and cold. We're weak and we're strong. We change our minds. We set goals and then we change the goals and adjust them, and this is understandable because we don't know very much and we're pretty weak.

Look what's happened within the Worldwide Church of God. Truth has become error. Error becomes truth—or does it? No, not at all. It only seems that way, but they are preaching it as though it were true.

With God, what He says He will honor. He is not devious. He is not misleading in anything, and this is always positive because it enables us to have complete confidence in Him. Human nature is so twisted that it will pervert even this truth into license to sin by emphasizing His mercy to such a great extent that we have a tendency to forget that He doesn't lie about the necessity of obedience and justice as well.

So there are blessings and cursings. There is mercy and justice. There is grace and law. There is the Kingdom of God and Gehenna fire. There is eternal life and eternal death. So God speaks honestly both sides; each is equally true.

You probably remember Mr. Armstrong saying that God will not budge one inch with His law. There's a basis in scripture for that in II Timothy 2:11-13 and that is because the law describes the essence of His character, and His character is the model of what we are to become, and for Him to budge on that law would be for Him to deny what He Himself is. So He is faithful to what He is and to what He says, and He has limited Himself so as to not allow His mercy to get in the way of His better judgment.

It is interesting on those verses there in II Timothy 2:11-13 that the *Expositor's Commentary* says, "*This is a very serious warning*" (that is, that God will not deny Himself). God will not show respect of persons in judgment. He has limited Himself there.

There might be a person that is, let's say, a joy to Him in terms of personality. But if this person is sinning as a way of life in a major part of life, God cannot play favorites even though He "likes" to be around this person, even though He loves the person very

Image and Likeness of God (Part 5) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

deeply. God cannot deny what He is. So when it says that there is no respect of persons with God, that's good. But you have to understand that. That just because He likes you, it cannot be a means for Him to overlook what His tests are revealing.

Here is a series of scriptures that you can put together: Romans 3:21-26; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:7-10. Basically what these verses say is that God will not save anyone apart from His grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing else is acceptable.

What this means in practical ramifications is that the works of faith are our duty. They are par for the course. They are good. They produce growth. They give a witness. They glorify God. But no matter how good, or how many they are, they absolutely in no way save us.

God loves such a one very deeply, but He will not allow our salvation on the basis of debt. Put these two sets of verses together, Hebrews 11:6 and James 1:5-7, and think about this—that there are seeming anomalies in life in which the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer and frequently are just barely scraping by.

It's not always this way, though there are those anomalies, and here's why. The wicked frequently learn how to manipulate the system that they are living in to their advantage, so they become wealthy, influential, and powerful. Others prosper because they work diligently and the natural effect of God's laws work to their benefit, even though they have nothing more than a passing interest in God, if they have any kind of passing interest at all. They have learned that doing things a certain way work.

We can look upon these people and say that they are wicked. But look at us. Here we are trying to obey God and we're barely scraping by and they seem to be doing so well. But once God calls us, the requirements of faith, which God has limited Himself to, kick in for our long-range benefit.

Do you know what Hebrews 11:6 and James 1:5-7 say? They say, basically, without faith it is impossible to please God. Jesus said in John 15, "*Without Me you can do nothing.*" You begin to see the anomalies.

Here are people without Christ who seem to be doing so well. Here are people without faith and they seem to be prospering and they are powerful. Here are we who have faith and we aren't doing very well. We're just barely scraping by.

Surely God would want to prosper us. Surely He would want to give us good things. No, God has limited Himself. Regardless of His power, He has limited Himself to working

within the framework of without faith in Him it is impossible to please Him.

He could prosper us without our lifting a finger. He could indulgently make everything work out to our advantage regardless of what we are involved in. Nothing would ever go wrong. Everybody would be instantly healed and our every request granted.

That's not the way it is, is it? God requires that we exercise faith in Him and that means that it is the means through which spiritual things are accomplished. That begins with simple confidence in His existence and it grows to include belief in His good news of the purpose for this awesome creation and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and it continues until it covers every aspect of life from daily bread to health and as complete a spiritual prosperity as we will permit. We could go on and on with these things.

In the last part of this sermon I want you to see that God is dealing with us in a very personal way. Though He is in heaven His own inherent powers enable Him to focus on any portion, any activity, any event, any circumstance that goes on anywhere in His creation. We can see minor forms of this in that we are able to be aware of things that are going on in a small area like in a room, and we can be aware of much that is going on within them. But God is unlimited in that way and He can focus His attention anywhere.

In addition to that, He has delegated responsibilities to others, and these angelic beings report back to Him. God, from time to time, will come personally to view what is going on. We see that He is testing us because He wants to see for His own satisfaction that things are the way they are in the course of life, which is in the course of our choices.

This purpose that He is working out to the end He is able to see very clearly in our spirit, in our mind, in our heart, that we are yielding to Him, submitting to Him, obeying Him, because we really do believe Him and because we love Him, we love His purpose, we love our brother, we are doing things in our lives that are giving Him every evidence. Like with Abraham, God is saying from time to time with us, "*Now I know.*"

You and I are going to be put through the test and we can expect that because God has made it be like that. We might speak of many things about God, about His limitless Fatherhood, or His grace, or His providence. But, again, if we would continue to look at the scriptures we would find it in the final analysis that these, too, are limited by the failures of those with whom He is dealing, by the choices that we make.

God must, therefore, limit Himself because of free moral agency. And do you know what? That works out to our benefit.

It's not so much that God cannot know beforehand what a human will do, but He does not choose to do this because of the very nature of His plan. We can believe that God is omnipresent and He can be that way—omnipotent by His very nature. But He limits Himself even as to whether He will know beforehand and, therefore, it cannot be known even by Him until we are tested. Isn't that the way we learn too? It's exactly the same principle.

I'm going to give you a brief summary. The overall purpose of this series of sermons has been to show several aspects of the nature of God that are part of showing that there is no trinity.

There is no mingling of vaporous essence-like smoke from different fires because the Father and the Son both have a body. They are one in union of mind and purpose and we can be one with them in the same way. God is not mere essence. He shows by an abundance of scriptures that He has a body of substance.

His body has the same parts as ours. They are named in numerous places.

He is located in one place at one time and His location is named in numerous places.

He moves about from place to place.

He becomes informed in the same basic ways we do.

He limits Himself even though He is Almighty. He limits Himself within the purpose of what He is accomplishing.

We are also in His image in that we, too, have intellectual, moral and spiritual powers. It is His purpose to bring us into His character image that we might spend eternity sharing life on His level.

I hope that this series has been helpful and informative to you and that your faith and that your relationship with God will be greatly increased by it.