

The Blessed and
Boundless God



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The Blessed and Boundless God

George Swinnock

Edited by
J. Stephen Yuille



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The Blessed and Boundless God

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*For who in the heaven
can be compared unto the LORD?
Who among the sons of the mighty
can be likened unto the LORD?*

—Psalm 89:6

Preface

“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea” (Job 11:7–9). We have a greater chance of holding the stars in the palm of our hand, measuring the mountains on a scale, gathering the oceans in a thimble, and balancing the world’s skyscrapers on a needle than we do of finding out “the Almighty unto perfection.” His perfection is higher than heaven, deeper than hell, longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. Heaven is high but limited; hell is deep but restricted; the earth is long but contained; and the sea is broad but confined. God alone is unlimited, unrestricted, uncontained, and unconfined.

This boundless God “looketh on the earth, and it trembleth: he toucheth the hills, and they smoke” (Ps. 104:32). A mere glance produces earthquakes, and a mere touch produces volcanoes. If these slight impulses

of God cause such devastation, what is the full effect of His power?

This boundless God “telleteth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names” (Ps. 147:4). In the time it takes me to snap my fingers, light circles the earth seven times. Traveling at that speed, if the sun were the size of a pea, it would take ten billion years to reach the edge of the universe. How long would it take traveling at a realistic speed? How long would it take given the sun’s actual size? We can’t get our minds around the computation. Some astronomers estimate that there are as many stars in the universe as there are grains of sand on the earth’s beaches. Here are two wonders: God can compute that number; and God can invent that number of names, one for each star.

This boundless God is a simple being. He is undivided, meaning His every thought and every action involve the whole of Him. He simultaneously gives total and undivided attention to everything and everyone. Moreover, His manifold attributes are His essence. They can no more be separated from Him than He can be separated from Himself. That means He isn’t merely wise; He is wisdom. He isn’t merely powerful; He is power. He isn’t merely good; He is goodness. He isn’t merely holy; He is holiness. He isn’t merely just; He is justice. God’s attributes are distinguished in their objects and effects, but they are all one in Him—His justice is His mercy, and His mercy is His justice; His

wisdom is His power, and His power is His wisdom; His knowledge is His patience, and His patience is His knowledge; His wrath is His goodness, and His goodness is His wrath.

This boundless God is a sovereign being. He is the first cause of every action, impulse, thought, and breath. The motions of all His creatures depend upon His concurrence. The power that made everything maintains everything; He upholds "all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). If He were to withhold His influence, the fire wouldn't burn, the eye wouldn't see, the sun wouldn't shine, the wind wouldn't blow, the hand wouldn't move, the bird wouldn't fly, and the grass wouldn't grow. He is the principle of cohesion that holds the entire cosmos in place: "He is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:17). It is impossible for any part of creation to exist for a moment apart from Him. He rules the universe fully and completely.

This boundless God isn't merely mighty, but almighty. He has never encountered difficulty—let alone impossibility. "None can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35). He knows what was, what is, what will be, what can be, and what can't be. By one pure, simple, eternal act of His infinite understanding, He knows all things perfectly, immediately, and distinctly—at every moment.

There is no proportion between this boundless God and our bound intellect, between this limitless God and

our limited mind, between this infinite God and our finite understanding. Those who hear Him most clearly hear but a faint whisper. Those who see Him most fully see but a small glimmer. Those who understand most about Him understand nothing in comparison to what there is to be known. God does “marvellous things without number” (Job 5:9). Can we “find out” God? We’re like small children standing on the beach, trying in vain to hold the ocean in a bucket.

Do we have any effect upon this boundless God? Does He need us? Does He gain anything from us? “Can a man be profitable unto God?” (Job 22:2). He is a perfect being, meaning He is incapable of increase or decrease. Nothing can be added to Him or subtracted from Him. He doesn’t require anything outside of Himself, nor does He benefit from anything outside of Himself. Our effect upon God is that of a snowball hurled at the blazing sun. What are we to God?

“Hell and destruction are before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?” (Prov. 15:11). God peers into the heart—weighing its desires, motives, impulses, and inclinations. He sees a heart riddled with self-love. This sin is an affront to Him—a transgression of His law, a rejection of His rule, a desecration of His goodness, and a violation of His glory. He has power to avenge Himself. He can cast us into hell with a mere look. A day is coming when He will deal definitively with sin. He “shall bring every work

into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:14). He is a perfect judge with unsearchable knowledge of the evidence and unrivaled power to execute the sentence.

Amazingly, this boundless God draws near to us in the incarnation. The Son of God clothed Himself with our humanity. He whom the heavens cannot contain was contained in the womb of a woman. He came so close that He experienced life in a fallen world. The Bread of Life was hungry, and the Water of Life was thirsty. He came so close that He bore our sin and shame and tasted death for us (Heb. 2:9). We placed ourselves where this boundless God deserves to be—on the throne. This boundless God placed Himself where we deserve to be—on the cross. His forgiveness supersedes our sinfulness, His merit eclipses our guilt, and His righteousness hides our vileness. His abundant mercy blots out our multitude of transgressions (Ps. 51:1).

By virtue of our union with Christ, we draw near to this boundless God. We find in Him all we could ever want. We find an eternal and spiritual good, suitable to our every need. We rest in Him as the dearest Father, wisest Guide, strongest Shield, greatest Good, closest Friend, richest Grace, highest Honor, kindest Comfort, finest Beauty, deepest Truth, and sweetest Love. Our knowledge of this boundless God diffuses into our soul a satisfying peace in this life and a ravishing foretaste of what awaits us in glory.

In brief, that is the message of George Swinnock's *The Blessed and Boundless God*.¹ His text is Psalm 89:6: "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?" From the psalmist's assertion that no one in heaven or earth is like God, Swinnock derives his principal doctrine—namely, God is incomparable. In chapters 1–30, he proves his doctrine by demonstrating God's incomparableness in His being, attributes, works, and words. In chapters 31–45, he applies his doctrine by demonstrating how God's incomparableness informs, counsels, and comforts us.

This is a tremendous book. Without question, Swinnock is a consummate theologian—steeped in Scripture, proficient in the arts and philosophies, and familiar with a wide spectrum of theological writers. But equally important is the fact that Swinnock is a pastor-theologian. That is to say, the aim of his theological inquiry is always the people of God. He views theology neither as a mere intellectual or theoretical exercise nor

1. George Swinnock was born in 1627 at Maidstone, Kent. He was a graduate of Cambridge (BA) and Oxford (MA). He was a pastor until his death in 1672. His writings are available in *The Works of George Swinnock*, ed. James Nichol, 5 vols. (1868; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992). Nichol's edition contains all of Swinnock's writings except *The Life and Death of Mr. Thomas Wilson, Minister of Maidstone, in the County of Kent, M.A.* (London, 1672). The original title for the present work is *The Incomparableness of God*. It is found in volume 4 of Swinnock's *Works*.

as a mere academic pursuit, but he sees it as the means by which we grow in acquaintance with God and, consequently, in godliness. For Swinnock, therefore, the goal of theology is to engage the mind with the ultimate purpose of embracing the heart's innermost affections.

I unreservedly recommend this book to you and encourage you to read it prayerfully, thoughtfully, and expectantly, keeping in mind Swinnock's simple conviction that "when we take the incomparable God as our God, we are incomparably blessed."

J. Stephen Yuille

Introduction

Our eternal happiness consists in large part in our perfect knowledge of the blessed and boundless God. When we “see him as he is,” we will be like Him in holiness and happiness (1 John 3:2). We will be fully satisfied with His love and likeness. Our noblest faculty (our understanding) will derive matchless delight from its intimate acquaintance with the greatest truth: God.

Our present holiness also depends a great deal upon our knowledge of God. According to the apostle Paul, all people are “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:18). In other words, people wander from God because they do not know Him. Dark corners of a house are filled with dust, dark cellars with vermin, and dark hearts with lusts. But when we come to know God, we desire Him. We know His beauty and bounty and love Him. We know His power and faithfulness and trust Him (Ps. 9:10). Moreover, we trample on the treasures of this world and endure the

loss of our possessions “joyfully” (Heb. 10:34) because we know God, who is “true riches” and “unsearchable riches” (Luke 16:11; Eph. 3:8). Like Moses, we refuse to be called the sons of kings’ daughters (condemning honors and spurning crowns) because we know God is our crown of glory (Heb. 11:24–25). We look to the Lord of glory, who so infinitely excels all earthly glory. Comparably speaking, we “hate” father, mother, spouse, children, and life itself, entrusting everything to our Maker because He is better than the whole creation (Luke 14:26). When “the God of glory” appeared to him, Abraham quickly and quietly left his country and family without hesitation (Acts 7:2–4). Similarly, all earthly glories fade when God makes Himself known to us. These stars vanish when the Sun of Righteousness appears.

Our Lord Jesus declares, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Knowing God is the principle of spiritual life and the start of eternal life. But who can know God when He infinitely surpasses all knowledge? It is true that the magnitude of God’s perfections is well beyond the reach of our finite understanding, but we can know what He has chosen to reveal. The starting point for such knowledge is the psalmist’s declaration: “For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?” (Ps. 89:6).

The causal particle “for” connects this verse to the previous verse: “And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.” The “heavens” (that is, the angels) rejoice in the church’s welfare and praise God for preserving His people and fulfilling His promises. In our verse, the psalmist elaborates on the cause of this praise by pointing to God’s incomparable excellence.

“Who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD?” Some people interpret “heaven” as referring to the sun, moon, and stars. They believe the psalmist’s point is that none of these luminaries can compare to “the Father of lights” (James 1:17). While that assertion is true, it is far more likely the psalmist is speaking of the heaven of heavens (the third heaven)—the dwelling place of the celestial spirits: cherubim and seraphim, angels and archangels, principalities and powers, thrones and dominions. Who among the innumerable company of angels can compare to the Father of spirits? Considered simply in themselves, angels are glorious creatures in respect to their power, wisdom, purity, and beauty, but considered comparatively with the blessed God, their glory is nothing.

“Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?” The “sons of the mighty” are the greatest rulers on earth. Elsewhere, they are described as “gods” and “children of the Most High” (Ps. 82:6). Yet they are nothing in comparison to God.

In these two questions, the psalmist challenges heaven and earth to bring forth anyone equal to God. Who in heaven or earth can be “compared” or “likened” to “the LORD”? The name “LORD” is *Jehovah*—God’s proper name. It signifies that He was and is and is to come. He is always the same, and He is the cause of all other beings (Ps. 102:26–28; Acts 17:28; Rev. 1:4–6).

The doctrine that emerges from the psalmist’s questions is this: God is incomparable. There is no one among the highest and holiest in heaven or earth like Him. The most excellent beings fall infinitely short of this Being of beings.

“Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord” (Ps. 86:8). Here, the psalmist does not compare God with the lowest but the highest. These “gods” include demons. They are the gods of this world, and they are the princes of the powers of the air (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2). They are like the Antichrist, “who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4). But among these demons, “there is none like unto thee, O Lord.” They are not even worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with the high and holy God.

These “gods” also include idols. Idols of gold and silver have mouths but cannot speak; they have eyes but cannot see; they have ears but cannot hear; they have noses but cannot smell; they have hands but cannot

handle; and they have feet but cannot walk (Ps. 115:4–7). Idols are the work of humans, who are themselves infinitely below their Creator. Therefore, “we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (1 Cor. 8:4).

These “gods” also include angels and rulers (Pss. 8:5; 82:6). God has stamped His image upon them in that they exercise authority and dominion over others. But among them, “there is none like to thee, O Lord.” They are “gods” by derivation and deputation, meaning their authority comes from God. They remain weak creatures, limited by God’s precepts and liable to God’s judgments. Their essence is from God, their subsistence is by Him, and their dependence is upon Him. God alone is the Most High: “higher than the highest” (Eccl. 5:8).

God is incomparable. The truth of this doctrine is clearly evident when we consider His being, attributes, works, and words.